

## Something To Think About

*What Do You Do With Your Money?*

By Fred H. Walker

**T**HERE is one thing for which most of us strive all our lives—MONEY.

As children, if we have wise parents, we are taught to save.

As we grow older we learn to earn and save.

As we get to middle age we know that if old age is to be made safe and comfortable we **MUST** earn while we can and save while we are earning.

But all this process of earning and saving is a useless procedure unless we properly care for the dollars that we accumulate.

Ever since the world began the possession of money by one person has been the incentive of others to seek to take it away and add it to their own stores.

Sometimes this is done by honest means, by the channels of trade. But always there are dishonest and unprincipled individuals who with hooks baited with tempting financial returns are trading on the human desire to get more money and get it as easily as possible.

How much of your money has gone or at this moment is in danger of going to somebody who is dangling in front of you a possible financial return for your hard-earned funds that is tempting you to take a risk that you know is dangerous?

Perhaps you think you are wise enough to detect the frauds among the schemes that are offered you. Are you?

A little while ago the appraisers of one estate found in the assets worthless mining stocks to the par value of more than a million, the whole amount of which was not worth one hundred cents. The owner of those stocks very likely thought he was wise enough to avoid being cheated.

In the latest compilation of worthless stocks made by an authority on the subject there was a total of nearly thirty thousand companies whose securities at one time or another were offered and sold to the public which had gone out of business with a total loss to every person who had made an investment with them.

That total represented many a little fortune totally wiped out, many a hard-earned and conscientiously accumulated saving turned into a complete loss.

It represented homes that had to be sacrificed, old age made unhappy and uncomfortable, and perhaps in many cases a sorrowful trip to the poor house.

Earning money and saving money are useless efforts unless when you have acquired the money you are wise enough to take care of it.

Don't gamble in stocks. Wiser and richer men than you have gone broke trying to make money in the market.

Unless you know about them do not buy any securities of any kind without the advice of some one who is acquainted with the investment of money.

If your money is in a bank, and that is where it should be unless it is already invested, get some officer of the bank to advise you.

If you think that there is an advantageous opportunity to buy real estate, go to some man who knows real estate and take his advice. It will be better to pay him for the advice than to lose the money.

Look on your money just as you do on your health.

If you have doubts as to whether you are eating the right food you go to some one in whom you have faith and ask advice and follow it.

Do the same thing with your pocket-book and its contents. Get good advice and follow it.

If you have been wholly honest with other people in getting your money, be wholly honest with yourself in taking care of it, and you cannot be that if you hope and try to gain more from its investment than it can properly earn.

There is a reasonable expectation from investment. To get less than that is cheating yourself. To try to get more is to seek to cheat the other fellow. And that doesn't pay.



*A Two Part Serial—  
This Eastern Girl Had  
a Cowboy Complex, but the  
Western Man Was a Wild  
and Woolly Maverick*

# Lady Tenderfoot

By George F. Worts

Author of "The Golden Brute," "The Prince and the Piker," etc.

## CHAPTER I

### BACK FROM THE HILLS



UT of the hills looming to the north of the old cow town of Mustang hastened a man on a buckskin horse. The buckskin picked his way nimbly down the trail toward the scattered handful of dwellings and stores which resembled, in the deceiving valley mist, smoothly chiseled blocks of dark stone suspended by gray cords from the sky.

The gray cords were smoke rising in the still air from breakfast fires, which accounted for the rider's haste. But it would have been hard to determine which of the two, the horse or the horseman, was the most excited.

A city man would have described Mustang as a jumping-off place in the wilderness. To Perry Wilder, the man on the horse, that careless collection of shanties and false-fronted stores was as civilized as a tile bathroom with silver fixtures. It was five weeks since he had seen a human being.





A HOSTILE MAN IN THE MOON

A normal horse and a normal man love their fellows and grow lonesome for their companionship. The buckskin, having smelled afar the several horses drowsing along the only street Mustang boasted, was hungry for their company, willing to nuzzle or fight at the drop of the hoof, as the case might be, as long as he acquired their society.

With a rolling drumbeat of galloping hoofs, Perry Wilder and the buckskin rolled into Mustang. An eventful day was started.

From the steamy interior of the Eat Here Restaurant issued a broad-shouldered, red-faced, handsome man of forty-five, wearing a blue flannel shirt, khaki breeches, and lace boots. He was Mr. Robert Quennin, owner of the Circle-Q.

"Here," Mr. Quennin muttered, "comes that damned horse."

But it was not said vindictively. Mr. Quennin employed the tone a man sometimes uses in referring to some prized possession that belongs to another.

To a horse lover, Perry Wilder's buckskin pony was a jolt delivered equally to the eye, the heart, and the brain. The animal was, in the direct and eloquent speech of the corral, "one hell of a horse," which is the most un-

qualified praise that any horse can merit. A dancing devil in his eyes bespoke a gay, dauntless spirit. Beautiful of line, deep of chest, and long of leg, he was a thing of speed, endurance, and equine elegance.

Perry Wilder, being a sentimentalist, had named him Kid, because that word, when it is pronounced just so, is the most sentimental word in our language. Kid carried both ears cocked forward with an air of alert, wise interest, except when he was running, when he laid them back and flew. He was faster than the shadow of a cloud and quicker than the jump of a flea.

One hell of a horse, indeed, and a one-man animal. Other men—some fortunate enough to be still living—had been privileged to try to ride Kid. One man, with an impressive rodeo record, had actually stayed aboard fourteen seconds, each one packed to the brim with dynamite and forked lightning. At the fifteenth second, a cowboy onlooker was inquiring in his soft, controlled voice:

"Does there happen to be a doctor in the crowd, gents?"

But with Perry Wilder, his lord and master, Kid was as docile as a brand-new bride.

The buckskin came to a spectacular stop, kicking up sprays of dust with

his fore hoofs, not a neck away from Mr. Robert Quennin, who spat some of the dust from his mouth and brushed the rest of it from the bosom of his blue flannel shirt with a large brown hand, while he firmly informed the star-spangled universe what he thought of shiftless and low-begotten horse owners who treated innocent bystanders like reservation Indians.

Perry Wilder swung himself out of his costly, silver-inlaid saddle with a grin. He was a tall, lean young man with the flat hips and square shoulders of one who lives by, for, and in the saddle; legs ever so slightly bowed; eyes arrestingly blue from long contemplation of remote horizons; sharply defined features; a laughing mouth; teeth whose whiteness was a little startling in his thin, sunburned face.

His get-up was spectacular. And what did you have to say about it? A vivid plaid shirt of blue and red, a pearl-gray Stetson with a woven silver band and one authentic bullet hole, chaps riveted with silver, fancy high-heeled boots, a gold-mouthed gun in a hand-tooled holster, a blazing orange bandanna knotted loosely at his leathery throat.

A movie cowboy? Well, no one took the trouble to mention it in Perry Wilder's hearing. He was, to himself, a romantic atom in a vast romantic domain—a land of flaming sunsets and shining deeds.

Mr. Robert Quennin shook him by the hand and drawled:

"Them saddlebags don't appear to be bustin' their seams with gold dust."

"Come on in, Bob," said Perry Wilder, "and tell me the news while I put both feet in the trough."

Mr. Robert Quennin planted his bulk squarely in the entrance of the Eat Here.

"Did you find gold or didn't you?" he demanded.

"A canary bird," the horseman answered, slapping the dust out of his hat on his knee, "one time got curious

about a cat's eyes and tried to peck them out. What the cat did to that canary bird was just child's play compared to what's goin' to happen to you if you don't stand aside and let me get at some solid nourishment."

"I am full of strength and vigor," stated Mr. Quennin, "from having recently consumed a thick, juicy steak. I can lam the tar out of any guy with an empty stomach. The price of admission to this here emporium of delicious viands and high class victuals is a frank and honest statement appertainin' to the gold in yonder hills. Is there or ain't there?"

"I found traces," Perry Wilder replied.

"Enough to entitle me to start a one-man gold rush?"

"I'm afraid not, Bob."

Mr. Quennin opened the door and the two men went inside and seated themselves at the lunch counter. A pale, thin, angular man with weak blue eyes and a pink nose, a nose that was hardly more than a pink button, arose startingly behind the counter like a jack-in-the-box.

This was Jimmy Van Dyne, cook, waiter, and dishwasher of the Eat Here, probably the only pale-faced man in a thousand square miles. In a town like Mustang, there must always be a Jimmy Van Dyne; a man who fits into this or that odd job, but never into the boisterous, virile life of the West.

A great gambler and a greater mystery was Jimmy Van Dyne. At craps, at poker, at faro, and at bootleg liquor, he was equally unfortunate. His past, like the past of many men who migrate silently and speedily to the West, was shrouded in silence.

Perry Wilder spiritedly shook his hand and as spiritedly said:

"Jimmy, you look on a man who hasn't had a square meal in five long weeks. I'll start the proceedings with a big bowl of oatmeal drowned in real cow's cream, the kind that doesn't come to the ultimate consumer via

some canning factory. A great big thick steak. Then a platter of ham and eggs, about nine eggs, I thank you kindly; and a stack of wheat cakes with some fresh coffee.

"Never mind that varnished remover you got in that big nickeled can. I want some good and fresh. I sure am fed up with my own home cooking. What's new? Anybody born, engaged, married, or buried since I been away?"

"Nothing ever happens here," said Jimmy Van Dyne. His eyes glistened with eagerness as he asked: "Did you find gold, Perry?"

"Traces," answered Perry.

"He ain't tellin'," said the owner of the Circle-Q.

Perry Wilder addressed himself with relish to a great mound of oatmeal. He said presently:

"Certainly I'm telling. I found traces, that's all. Traces."

"Well," drawled Bob Quennin, "there are traces and traces. How much is a trace? What was the highest she ever went to the pan?"

"About a dime."

"Then you wasted these five weeks?"

"No, sir!" said Perry Wilder emphatically. "I've worked out some good new hunches. I'm going to work along the northern edge of the big coulee."

"It's been worked, Perry."

"Not right. I'll find it. It's there."

"Yeah, and it's going to stay there. What a damned fool you are!"

Perry Wilder consumed oatmeal in silence. He wasn't offended. He finished the oatmeal before he spoke.

"That's what you say now. But wait till I'm rich. Wait till I go by here in a platinum-plated limousine studded with emeralds!"

Bob Quennin expressed his opinion of the platinum-plated limousine with a snort.

"Forty years from now you'll be just another old desert rat with a beard down to your knees, beggin' a grub

stake and sayin', 'I got a hunch. A fella came to me in a dream the other night and showed me a mountain made of solid gold.'"

Perry Wilder chuckled.

"A guy with your ability," went on the owner of the Circle-Q, warming to his theme, "ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're twenty-seven years old. With all the time and energy you've spent prospecting, you'd have a nice ranch of your own. There isn't a better cowman in this State than you. It's time you settled down. Why don't you come to work for me? I need a foreman, and the job's yours if you want it."

"How's business?" Perry replied.

"It's fine."

Perry Wilder looked at him intently. Tiny wrinkles suddenly made a fanlike formation at the corners of his blue eyes, and he grinned.

"You're bluffing. You mean, business is fine for the bank that holds your paper."

"Business would be better," Bob Quennin begrudgingly admitted, "if you'd help me work my ranch. You know cattle and horses and ranching generally better than any man in this section. Cut out this rainbow chasing and be my foreman. Think it over, will you? I've got to be running along."

Perry grinned. "Sure, Bob, I'll think it over."

When the owner of the Circle-Q had gone, Perry Wilder looked up from his steak and met the wavering, weak eyes of Jimmy Van Dyne.

"How are things going for you, Jimmy?"

"Fine, Perry; just fine!"

"Stop bluffing," said Perry. "The minute I came in this door, I knew something was the matter. You're worried about something. Been losing your shirt at poker again?"

Jimmy Van Dyne had suddenly turned pale. The accuracy of Perry's diagnosis was further verified by the

eagerness with which Jimmy placed his elbows on the counter and leaned forward.

"Perry," he got out in a thin, nervous voice, "I'm in an awful jam. I don't know what to do. My father is coming to this town!"

"Well?" said Perry.

Jimmy Van Dyne beat softly on the edge of the counter with a white fist.

"If he finds out what I am, it—it 'll kill him!"

Perry said philosophically: "In that case you'd better tell him not to come. I'll ride over to Silver Springs and send him a wire."

"It's too late," said Jimmy Van Dyne in a voice of despair. "He's on the way. He'll be in Silver Springs the day after to-morrow, and here the day after that. You see, Perry—"

The cook, dishwasher, and waiter of the Eat Here stopped. His eyes upon Perry Wilder were desperate. He was beating a tattoo on the counter with his clenched white fist.

"He—he thinks I've made a big go of my—my ranch!"

"Your what?" Perry gasped.


"My ranch!"

"Since when have you had a ranch, Jimmy? This sure is news to me."

"That's just it!" Jimmy Van Dyne blurted. "I haven't. But he—he thinks I'm a successful rancher. That's why he's coming to Mustang. He's coming to visit me on my ranch!"

## CHAPTER II

### BLACK SHEEP

ERRY WILDER slowly chewed the mouthful of beefsteak and considered Jimmy Van Dyne with thoughtful blue eyes. When he had swallowed the steak he said dryly:

"This is a fine looking ranch! Just how do you aim to wiggle out of this jam?"

"I don't know!" Jimmy wailed.

"What can I do?"

"You'd better fade, kid. Yes, sir, you'd just better hit the grit and wear out a whole lot of sole leather."

"I—I was thinking," faltered the desperate young man, "that you or somebody might meet them."

"Who," Perry interrupted, "is them?"

"My cousin and her *fancé*. I was thinking you might meet them and tell them I was suddenly called away to chase rustlers and would probably be gone a long time. They'd soon grow tired of Mustang. Then, later, I could write him a letter and tell him I had to chase the rustlers way down over the Mexican border and—"

"That won't work," Perry stopped him. "It's fishier than a barrel of kippered herring. You'd better face the issue. You'd better meet the old boy and tell him the truth. My experience in this vale of tears has been that it's easier walking through a barbed wire entanglement than out of one of these complicated lies. How in Sam Hill did you get yourself into this fool mess?"

"I needed money," Jimmy eagerly explained. "While you were out prospecting, I—I had a run of awful luck. I gave a lot of I. O. U's, and Jim Farley, he had most of them, had to have the money. So I wrote my father and told him I needed more money for improvements on the ranch and—"

"Wait a minute," Perry checked him. "Let me get this straight. This ranch of yours wasn't born yesterday, was it?"

The general factotum of the Eat Here was again pounding futilely on the counter. When he did not answer, Perry said sharply:

"You invented this ranch a long time ago, did you, to pry money out of the old man?"

"Not exactly," Jimmy said. "You see, I've always been the—black sheep. I've never told you about my family, but I might as well now. My father



is Pierpont V. Van Dyne."

Perry Wilder looked at him steadily. Not by the alteration of a single facial muscle did he betray surprise at this information. He slowly munched his jaws. He looked at Jimmy as if he expected him to go on. But Jimmy said, in sharp accents of surprise:

"You knew it!"

"I had a hunch," Perry Wilder admitted, and he removed from the buttoned pocket of his plaid shirt a dark leather wallet. Opening this, he extracted a folded newspaper clipping. He laid the clipping on the counter and Jimmy Van Dyne stared at it.

A somewhat blurred likeness of a pretty, smiling, dark-eyed girl gazed out from the clipping. Below, a caption read: "Nedra Van Dyne, niece of Pierpont V. Van Dyne, the capitalist. Her engagement to Mr. Colton Blick, polo player, sportsman, is rumored."

Beside the reproduction of Nedra Van Dyne was a face that might have been Jimmy Van Dyne's, except that it was older and stronger, and had the eyes of an eagle. It was labeled: Pierpont V. Van Dyne.

"How long," Jimmy breathed, "have you had this?"

"Four months," Perry answered.

"Why are you carrying it around?"

"When a fellow is off by himself," said Perry, "he needs something else besides scenery to look at. I sort of liked that girl's face. It's a pretty nice face. I guess I've about worn it out looking at it. Yes, sir, that girl has a nice face. It will give me great pleasure to meet her and escort her to your ranch. Now, go back and tell me all about this ranch of yours."

"My father kicked me out six years ago," Jimmy answered, "because I didn't amount to a damn. I was flunked out of Yale and kicked out of two jobs. I know it almost broke his heart. I'm the only son, you see, and he expected me to pick up the Van Dyne banner and carry it to new heights.

"The more I thought about it, the sorrier I felt for my father. I began writing him letters, telling him how hard I was working. The first three letters came back unopened; but then he began reading them and answering them.

"He was pretty cagy at first, but I knew he was tickled pink. As long as I made good, it was all right with him. I wasn't making good. I wasn't doing anything. Well, you've known me since I've been out here; you know what I've been doing."

"You mean," said Perry, "that you've been a pen-and-ink rancher ever since you came to Mustang?"

Jimmy Van Dyne, avoiding his eyes, nodded. It was a cool morning, but his forehead was wet with perspiration. He went on earnestly:

"I only did it to relieve his mind, Perry. I didn't seem to have the guts to make good at anything. He told me he never wanted to see me again, and I thought he meant it. I couldn't see any harm in letting him think I was making good. So I wrote those letters.

"I told him I was working on a ranch, and planning to have one of my own some day. About a year later I told him I had been saving my wages and had bought an interest in a ranch. A year later I told him I had bought the ranch outright. He wanted to see photographs of it, so—"

Jimmy Van Dyne stopped and looked at Perry Wilder miserably.

"So I sent him some!"

"You sent him pictures of a ranch that doesn't exist?"

"It does exist! It's the Circle-Q!"

Perry Wilder laid down his knife and fork. He placed his large, brown hands on the edge of the counter and considered Jimmy Van Dyne for several seconds.

"You sent your old man photographs of Bob Quennin's ranch?" he asked slowly.

Jimmy wretchedly nodded.

"And said you owned it?"

Again the cook and dishwasher of the Eat Here nodded. Perry Wilder looked at him with amazement.

"Oh," he chanted, "what tangled webs we weave when we rope out a cow with another fellow's brand on it! Well, what happened then?"

"My father was simply tickled pink. He wrote me a long letter, telling me how delighted he was that I'd made my mark at last, and saying that he had had the photographs framed and that they were hanging in his office. He said he certainly admired the grit I'd shown, and he knew I must be having a pretty hard time of it, and inclosed a check for a thousand dollars."

"Which you sent right back," said Perry.

"I lost it in one night at poker," Jimmy groaned. "I'm telling you the honest truth, Perry. I didn't think it would work out that way. I only wanted to please him. I didn't dream he'd send money. After that—"

"Well, I'm weak. I know I'm weak. It was too easy to resist. When I needed money, I'd simply mention in a letter that a lot of my cattle had been killed in a freeze, or I wanted to drive a well, or the house needed shingling. And by return mail a check would come. It never occurred to me that he would want to come out and pay me a visit.

"While you were gone Bob Quennin repainted his house and put in a lot of modern improvements. I wrote dad that I wanted to paint the house and put in these modern improvements. He sent me a check for fifteen hundred, and said he was coming out to see me; that he had long ago forgiven me for the things I had said just before he kicked me out; that he was proud of me and—wanted to see this big, fine rancher he had for a son."

Jimmy Van Dyne paused. With a wet rag he was slowly, mechanically mopping the counter.

"This big, fine rancher!" he repeat-

ed. And suddenly his eyes glittered with terror.

"Perry, what am I going to do? There's no way to head him off. How can I explain anything? You say: 'Make a clean breast of it.' But you don't realize what a blow it will be to him. He's old. His heart is bad. For six years he's been building up this picture of me, a successful son. It'll kill him, Perry. It'll simply kill him! Oh, I know I'm a fool and a rotten coward, and—"

"I wasn't thinking of that," Perry stopped him. "I was wondering if there wasn't some way of wiggling you out of this mess."

Jimmy Van Dyne's eyes brightened, then became dull with despair again. He shook his head woefully.

"There isn't any way. I've thought and thought. I haven't slept since I got his letter."

Perry picked up the clipping. He looked at it a long time.

"Your father," he said presently, "looks to me like a fine old boy. And proud! It seems a shame to punch him in the face with the truth. Look here, Jimmy. Supposing I could figure out some way to save him that punch in the face, what would you do about it?"

Jimmy looked at him with an anxious frown.

"I mean," Perry went on, "if I found some way of getting you out of this trouble, would you keep right on being a bum gambler and a counter jumper in a quick lunch? I think you've improved a lot since you hit Mustang six years ago, but why can't you follow out your letters? Why can't you get work on a ranch, save your wages, and get into the business?"

"I suppose," Jimmy faltered, "I could."

"If I can give you any help on this muddle," said Perry grimly, "you not only could but you're going to. You're going to promise that, and you're going to keep your promise. Would you

promise?"

"I'd promise anything!" Jimmy cried.

Perry Wilder sadly shook his head.


"Yes, you'd promise anything. And five minutes later you'd be shooting craps behind the barn. Well, I'm going to think it over, Jimmy. I'm going to think it over because I have a lot of sympathy for fathers with sons who write come-on letters. And I'm curious to find out if Miss Nedra Van Dyne is as cute as she looks. And while I'm thinking it over, you keep away from booze and galloping dice."

He got up and scowlingly considered Jimmy Van Dyne's pale, anxious face.

"You go out and stand in the sun for two hours, understand? You're a hell of a looking rancher, you are! The first thing a rancher gets is a sunburn. You get busy and find a sunburn while I see what can be done about finding a ranch!"

### CHAPTER III

#### A FLIP FOR DESTINY

ERRY WILDER issued from the Eat Here with a fresh cigarette pasted to his firm, lean lower lip. He disgorged a cloud of smoke and took a deep breath of the crisp morning air. His eyes traveled up the blue valley to an ocher butte. They passed it and roamed among the pink and purple mountains, which seemed to fold one over the other, range upon range, until they dwindled off into remote lavender haze.

Each time he had passed through that torn and tumbled region, he had looked back, and wondered briefly at the existence of romance which you saw from here and saw not when you were there.

Perry glanced up and down the deserted street, filled his young lungs again, and said to the buckskin: "Kid, follow papa."

With a plume of blue smoke curling upward from his gray Stetson, with Kid walking sedately behind him, he proceeded to Jim Farley's livery stable. Bob Quennin's piebald saddle mare, Pinto, was tied outside.

"Stay here," Perry instructed the buckskin, "and don't saw yourself off any trouble, understand?" He slid a lump of sugar between Kid's strong, white teeth, and went into the stable.

The owner of the Circle-Q was in animated discussion with Jim Farley, the object of their conference being an ink-black gelding with one wall eye. The livery stable proprietor warmly shook Perry's hand and Bob Quennin said:

"Perry, this lying scoundrel is trying to sell me this pile of poor, flea-bitten, worn out, ornery horseflesh. He is asking a hundred dollars. Cast your expert eye over this horse and give me your opinion."

Perry looked the horse over quickly.

"That horse's name is Midnight. He used to belong to Oscar Saul, who couldn't cure him of kicking and sold him to Pete Renney. Pete Renney could cure an elephant of using its trunk, and I know Midnight's stopped using his hind hoofs except for business. He's a buy at ninety."

Bob Quennin slowly nodded his head.

"You hear that, Jim? This fellow knows more about horses and cows than any five ranchers in the valley. Ain't it wonderful how he uses his talents? I'll take Midnight for ninety."

"He's yours," said Mr. Farley.

"I suppose," said the owner of the Circle-Q, with a sardonic grin at the amateur prospector, "you've come to tell me you've considered my proposition and are willin' to come to work as my foreman."

"I want to talk a proposition with you," Perry answered. "Come on outside. This is extremely confidential."

Bob Quennin followed him outside.

His glances, as they walked out, were birdlike and wary. They seated themselves in the warm sunlight on a weather-worn bench.

"If this is a grub stake proposition, Perry, you can write me right off the list. I am not buying the half interest in any undiscovered gold mine this morning. To be frank, open, and aboveboard, you can't spring any proposition that I'll take—except the one of going to work as the foreman of the Circle-Q."

"Bob," said Perry, "you've known me a good long while. What do you think my worst fault is?"

"Your worst fault?" repeated Mr. Quennin brightly, and his eyes glowed. "Your worst fault is shiftlessness, orneriness, stubbornness, wastefulness, extravagance, conceit, egotism—"

"No," Perry checked him, "it's my sense of duty."

The owner of the Circle-Q looked at him owlishly, then placed his hands on his knees and indulged in a hearty laugh.

"It's a fact," Perry insisted. "It's why I don't go to work for you. Supposing I went to work as your foreman. I'd work my fingers to the bone. I'd snap the whip over that gang of bullwhackers you've got out there. I'd make them toe the line. I'd cut down your feed bills."

"I'd take charge of the breeding end, and get you started on a line of higher grade cattle. I'd get you out of debt. All in all, I'd work my fingers to the bone. Pretty soon, Mr. Robert Quennin would be riding around in a swell car and taking trips to Europe. I would be just a good, efficient foreman. My sense of duty would make me do all that. And my sense of duty would make me stay."

Bob Quennin's eyes had become dreamy.

"That," Perry went on, "is why I won't do it. I am always thinking of the other fellow's interests, and neglecting my own. That's why I'm a self-

ish prospector. But just a few minutes ago, my sense of duty was mounted, and it's being given a ride. I have undertaken to help a man prevent a murder. And you are going to help, too."

Briefly and briskly Perry told him of Pierpont V. Van Dyne's impending visit, and of the delicate position in which Jimmy Van Dyne had foolishly placed himself.

"There is only one way out of it," Perry concluded. "You have got to lend us the Circle-Q for about a month."

"And there is only one answer to your proposition," answered Bob Quennin, "and that's a loud burst of laughter."

"You won't help me?"

"Why should I? Jimmy Van Dyne means nothing to me. His old man means less. I'm in the cattle business, not the black sheep business. Jimmy Van Dyne has got himself into this mess. Let him get himself out of it. With his imagination, it ought to be easy."

Perry fixed his clear blue eyes on a pink cloud that was drifting like a ship along the western horizon.

"Here," he said, "is the old man's picture. He looks to me like a nice old boy."

Bob Quennin accepted the clipping. He grinned.

"You're nothing but a great, big, generous boy," he said. "This little lady isn't by any chance comin' along, is she?"

"It just happens that she is."

The owner of the Circle-Q stopped grinning.

"Perry," he said, "will you take the advice of a man who is older and maybe a little more experienced? These society girls are dangerous. The easiest thing they do is to make fools of nice, big, generous cowboys like you. How many times I have seen it happen!"

"They come out here, and they are



the prettiest, cutest things that God ever made. Let's take this one. I can tell you just what will happen. You'll fall head over heels the minute you clap eyes on her. And she'll string you along.

"She'll go ridin' with you. She'll go out and look at the stars with you, and she'll sort of lean against you and say, 'My, aren't they close to-night. They just terrify me, they're so close!' And you'll comfort her and protect her from the nassy old stars."

"Applesauce!" snorted Perry.

"I'm telling you, kid," insisted Mr. Quennin. "And by the time she gets ready to go home, you'll think you're engaged. She'll have let you hold her hand and mebbe have a kiss or two. And she's goin' to see you again real soon."

"And she goes away and you stay, and she leaves an emptiness behind her that's bigger than the emptiness of all these hills and deserts thrown together. And nothin' ever fills it, kid. She never comes back. And another nice, big, good-lookin', blue-eyed cowboy has been made a sucker of!"

"Speaking of imagination," snorted Perry, "Jimmy Van Dyne is a rank amateur alongside of you. I got no designs on this little lady, and when and if she comes out, yours truly is going to leave her alone. Get that? This is no pretty romance that I'm staging."

"My sense of duty is simply aroused to prevent Jimmy Van Dyne from murdering his father in cold blood, which is what would happen if the old boy saw Jimmy tossing wheat cakes in the Eat Here. The old man has a lot of pride and a weak heart. And you're going to help."

"Not me," said Mr. Quennin with simple directness.

"I will toss up a nickel," said Perry. "If it comes heads, you loan me the Circle-Q for a month. If it comes tails, you don't loan me the Circle-Q, and I work for you as foreman for one entire year for no wages."

Bob Quennin gazed at him thoughtfully. He drew from his breast pocket a package of cigarettes. He extracted a cigarette and lighted it. He puffed.

"I'm not interested in your proposition," he said.

"You're bluffing," said Perry. "You're a good Christian, and you want to stop an old man from having his heart broken as much as I do. And you'd like to get my services free for a whole year. Here's the nickel."

"On one side of it is the picture of an Indian; on the other is the picture of a buffalo. This nickel is going up into the air. If it falls down with the buffalo up, you get me free of charge for one entire year—twelve long months of scientific ranching."

"No," said Bob Quennin faintly, but he looked at the nickel with greedy eyes.

"Think!" Perry urged him. "A man who will make those good-for-nothing cow hands of yours toe the mark! Lower feed bills! Bigger profits! Trips to Europe! Swell automobiles!"

"Flip it!" snapped Mr. Quennin.

Perry snapped the coin into the air. It went up, flashing as it spun over and over, sparkling with sunlight, and dropped with a *plunk* into the dust at their feet.

The Indian head was uppermost.

Bob Quennin eloquently relieved his feelings. It was said of him that he could give a mule-skinner the five worst cusswords known, and still out-swear him.

"I want to know," he said presently, "what you would have done about Jimmy Van Dyne if it had fallen tails up?"

"I am full of propositions," grinned Perry. "Maybe I would have bought the Circle-Q outright. What are you asking, cash, for that run-down ranch?"

"Fifteen thousand," answered Mr. Quennin. "And what I also want to know is, how are you going to get

away with it? I move out before the Van Dyne's move in, and then what?"

"Then I take charge."

"How are you going to stop the hands from talking?"

"I'll size them up. The ones I can't trust I'll send out to ride or fix fence. I'll send them after that bunch of wild horses in the basin. The ones who stay on the ranch I'll talk to, man to man."

"You won't get away with it," Bob Quennin warned him. "If there's one thing a cowhand likes to do better than anything else it's to hear himself talk. There's nothing like a pretty girl to make a cowboy confidential."

"Well, kid, you've won the bet, and you're welcome to use the Circle-Q, because I know it will be better off when I come back than when I leave. The wife and I will pack out to the Coast for a well-earned vacation. But you're letting yourself in for nothing but trouble. You can't keep the beans from being spilled."

"Is Mike Hartley still your foreman?"

"He is."

"Send him away for a month. I'm going to be foreman. Is Ching Lee still your cook?"

"He is."

"Ching Lee never talks, anyway. I can bank on him."

"Yes, you can bank on Ching Lee. But, Perry, you can't get away with it. You're having a pipe dream. There are too many possibilities of a leak. You're going to make it worse for Old Man Van Dyne than if he just walked into the Eat Here and learned the truth straight."

"You aren't a good enough liar to get away with it. This pretty niece will be a monkey wrench in the machinery. You're too good looking yourself. Women are experts at smelling out a mystery. Trouble is their watchword. Romance is their dish. What you're cooking up is a great big meat pie for this little flapper."

"She isn't a flapper," said Perry sternly.

"They don't have to flap to start trouble. The ability to start trouble has been handed down unimpaired from woman to woman since Eve had the gates of Eden slammed behind herself and pore old Adam. Perry, you ain't huntin' for trouble—you're usin' a dragnet for it!"

"I'm not worried," Perry growled.

But he was. Being an impulsive young man, he was always acting first and thinking afterward. His recklessness had plunged him into trouble before, but never to the extent to which a malicious destiny was busily shaping events now.

## CHAPTER IV

### WHEN EAST MEETS WEST



HE first indication that worry and anxiety were to be his bedfellows took the form of a glance from a pair of smiling green eyes. Up to this point, Perry had met and overcome all obstacles, all threats, all promises of disaster. Arriving at the Circle-Q on Friday morning, he had spent the entire day in preparing the scene with as much care as if he were planning some diabolical crime.

As soon as Mr. and Mrs. Quennin had started forth on their drive to the seaboard in their new roadster, Perry began the long, hard task of eliminating evidence. From room to room he went through the house, gathering up a photograph here, a woman's garment there, and carrying armful after armful up to trunks in the attic. Each time he made a new inspection, he found objects he had previously overlooked. Not until Ching Lee called him to lunch was he satisfied that the house would pass the most critical, inquisitive inspection.

The dining room in the ranch house was large and square. Down the cen-

ter ran a long table, at which the cowboys sat. In one corner, near a south window, stood a small table at which the rancher, his wife, and their infrequent guests ate. Perry ate his noon meal at the long table, and when it was over he made a short but eloquent speech to the cowhands. Pushing back his chair, and looking up and down the two lines of brown faces, he said:

"Boys, you must all be mystified by what is going on around this ranch. I am going to come clean with you, because I need your help. You all know Jimmy Van Dyne, the hash-slinger down at the Eat Here. But none of you know that his father is Pierpont Van Dyne, the Wall Street banker. Jimmy has got himself into a barrel of trouble, which is why I am here, and why Mr. and Mrs. Quennin have gone away for a month, leaving me in charge.

"Jimmy's father kicked him out six years ago because he was no-account. Since then Jimmy has been trying to convince the old man that he is trying to make good."

Perry then related the story of Jimmy's fateful correspondence with his father.

"Jimmy's old man, his cousin, who is a young lady, and the man she is rumored to be engaged to will be here to-morrow afternoon. That's why Jimmy took the old touring car this morning. He has gone to Silver Springs to meet them.

"I'm sure," he went on earnestly, "that I can count on all of you to see this through. I'm doing it because I'm a soft-hearted fool. There isn't anything in it for me. And there isn't anything in it for you. I'm going to pose as foreman while Jimmy poses as ranch owner. You're going to pose as hard working cowhands. Ranch work will go on as usual. What I want to know is—are you with me?"

A chorus of good-natured assent answered him.

"Let me put it another way," said

Perry. "Does anybody think that this is a low down, scurvy trick on anybody, or that I'm grinding an ax?"

There was no answer to this. The cowboys' attitude remained friendly.

"It isn't every day," Perry went on, "that a hard-boiled gang like us has a chance of doing a good, Christian deed. That's all I have to say. Just remember to call Jimmy Mr. Van Dyne, and treat him with the same respect you use with Mr. Quennin."

When the men had filed out, Perry called Ching Lee over from the stove. Ching Lee was a fat, slit-eyed Buddha. To him Perry said:

"Ching Lee, you heard what I said. You can help me more than anybody else. What do you say?"

Ching Lee grinned.

"See nothing, hear nothing, say nothing," answered Ching Lee. "Velly nice motto."

Perry tossed upon the table a tobacco sack. It landed with a faint thud.

"That bag," said Perry, "has better than forty dollars worth of gold dust in it. It represents the hard labor of five weeks. Tuck it into your war-bag, Ching Lee. It's your reward for having a damned fine motto."

The following afternoon the Easterners arrived, with Jimmy at the wheel of the battered old touring car that the Quennins used for emergencies, for marketing and for sawing wood. It was an early ancestor of Detroit's present graceful, streamline produce.

Jimmy, Perry decided as he advanced to the car, looked his part. His face was red and blistered from sun and wind. His Stetson, perched at a jaunty angle, definitely stamped him Western. By the expressions on the faces of his passengers, Perry gleaned that all was going well.

Exclamations of pleasure and delight at the ranch were still being made. But Jimmy looked worried. His eyes were worried. His mouth had a frightened look. He darted a glance at

Perry which plainly said that trouble was on the way.

Perry wondered if the girl sitting beside him had anything to do with it. She was exactly what he had expected, a flapper. She was young and extremely pretty. Her head was beautifully shaped and practically naked of hair. He had seen boyish bobs, but never a bob so boyish as this.

It was black hair, and she wore it skinned back from her face. And she had deep green eyes. They were large, deep green eyes, which sparkled with mischief. He noted that she had a slightly turned up nose, across the bridge of which scampered a great many freckles.

The flapper was the first to leave the car. She seemed to pop out of it, and she came toward him, with an easy smile, with her hand outstretched.

"So you're Perry Wilder! I'm Nedra Van Dyne!"

Perry was vaguely aware that she wore a blue suit, a white silk shirtwaist. Her eyes dazzled him. They were playing a strange trick. Their sparkle was turning to a glow, her smile was fading. Her mouth became a little girl's mouth, with a slightly elevated Irish upper lip, a lower lip that was rather full and very red.

The change was bewildering to Perry. From a flapper with a mocking smile, she had suddenly become, as she looked up at him, serious, wistful. Her green eyes seemed to yearn at him. For a moment he was alarmed. Then he stiffened slightly. Somehow, in a way impossible to explain, she was making a monkey out of him before she had even met him. His voice was low, under perfect control:

"I'm mighty glad to know you, Miss Van Dyne."

Her clear young voice said:

"Jimmy has been telling us what a marvelous foreman you are. He said he wouldn't be where he is to-day if it hadn't been for you."

"That was nice of Ji—of Mr. Van

Dyne."

Jimmy and the two men in the back seat alighted.

"Perry," said Jimmy, "I want you to meet my father."

Perry found himself looking into the lean, lined, waxlike face of an old man, a face upon which illness had laid its unmistakable stamp. Only the eyes, fierce and blue, linked this broken old man with the reputation of Pierpont V. Van Dyne. They were proud old eyes, burning with the fires of an unconquerable spirit.

Something in Perry went out to this old warrior. For the first time, since he had rashly undertaken to keep the truth about Jimmy Van Dyne from his father, Perry felt satisfied. His judgment told him that Pierpont Van Dyne had not long to live, and he was glad that he would afford him some happiness.

The fierce old eyes searched his features, then began to sparkle.

"I'm glad to find a man like yourself working for my son," said the old warrior.

"And this," said Jimmy, "is Mr. Blick, Perry. Mr. Blick, my foreman, Mr. Wilder."

Perry released Mr. Van Dyne's hand and turned. Cold gray eyes, full of amused contempt, were taking him in. Colton Blick was not the type of Easterner Perry had met in the past. Not by any stretch of the imagination could he be called a dude. He had the wide shoulders and the trim waist of an athlete. His skin was not pale, but as bronzed as Perry's. His smile was a flashing challenge—a challenge to what?

"So this is the greatest horseman in the State! It is, I assure you, a distinction!"

He shot out a hard brown hand. Perry gripped it. Colton Blick grinned into his eyes. Now Perry Wilder was a hard, tough-muscled young man. His opinion of Easterners was not very high. He had been known to refer to



them as lily-fingered tenderfeet.

But this man was no lily-fingered tenderfoot. The grip he exerted was that of a machinist's vise. Hard, knotty veins made their appearance at Perry Wilder's temples as he endeavored to return that crushing grip, and a flood of crimson darkened his face.

Colton Blick released him so suddenly that Perry almost grunted with relief from the strain. His face remained dark red. He was willing to throw his gold-mounted gun on the ground and settle with bare knuckles with this arrogant Easterner.

And he wondered at the man's obvious attitude of dislike. What was in the air? He glanced at the girl. Her green eyes were fixed curiously on his face, as if something she saw there fascinated her. She smiled faintly.

"I'm very curious to see this marvelous horse of yours," Colton Blick was saying.

"It would be a pleasure to show him to you," Perry responded in the friendliest tones he could summon. Never had he been called upon to exercise such self-control. The task confronting him, of playing this game through to the end, seemed suddenly hopeless.

His heart banged sickeningly. Had he removed all the evidence from the house? Would the cowhands keep their mouths shut? The voice of Bob Quennin mocked him: "You can't get away with it, Perry. You aren't a good enough liar."

"Is it true," Colton Blick asked, "that no one but you has ever ridden your horse?"

"A good many have tried," Perry politely answered, "but Kid always gets rid of them in a hurry."

"I'd like to try him," asserted the handsome Easterner.

"It wouldn't be wise, Mr. Blick. Kid's a one-man horse."

"Maybe we can make a two-man horse of him," said Colton Blick.

"Colton is really a marvelous horseman," Nedra Van Dyne put in.

"He plays polo like a streak and he's hunted since he was a babe in arms."

Colton Blick looked at her sharply, but Miss Van Dyne missed the rebuke in his eyes because she was gazing at Perry.

"I've never been on a ranch before," she told him. "It's my first trip West, and I'm dying to see everything and meet everybody. Are those men cowboys?"

"They are," Perry answered.

"And is that the corral they're sitting on?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's the corral, the big corral. We've got smaller ones."

"Oh," she exclaimed, and her eyes were dancing, "I think it's perfectly swish!"

"Swish?" Perry echoed.

"Yes. Swish!"

"She means," Pierpont Van Dyne interpreted, "that it's slick, swell, or elegant. I pride myself on being only about six months behind the vocabulary of the new generation. I'll admit it keeps me puffing to stay that close."

Miss Van Dyne was gazing steadily into Perry's darkly tanned face. She said in a small meek voice:

"If I get right into my riding clothes, will you show me around? I ride pretty well, don't I, uncle? I've ridden some mean horses in my day, if I do say so myself."

Her uncle chuckled. Jimmy said:

"Perry will be delighted to show you everything, and I think he mentioned he has a horse for you. Midnight, Perry?"

"Yes," said Perry. "Midnight."

"Ching Lee will take your things up to the house. While you're getting settled, I've some business matters to discuss with Perry, if you'll excuse us? Well, dad, how do you like my ranch?"

Pierpont Van Dyne walked to Jimmy and placed his hands on his shoulders. Perry saw that his eyes were moist. The old warrior was half smiling.

"Jim," he began and stopped.

"Jim," he tried again, "I—think it's fine. You've got a beautiful ranch. I—I'm proud of you, Jimmy."

He turned and started for the house. Perry was conscious of a desire to clear his throat. Something seemed to be squeezing at his heart. If that old warrior ever learned the truth!

## CHAPTER V

### THE CHALLENGE

**P**ERRY," said Jimmy excitedly, a few minutes later, when they were alone, "the beans are spilled! Oscar Saul is coming over to pay dad a visit! They're old friends! What are we going to do?"

Perry fished a cigarette out of his pocket and lighted it. He had, with characteristic blind enthusiasm, overlooked the probability that Pierpont Van Dyne, with his wide acquaintance, might know some rancher in this neighborhood. Oscar Saul, one of the wealthiest ranchers in the State, lived only eight miles away. He and Bob Quennin were the best of friends. How was Oscar Saul to be dealt with? The beans were indeed spilled!

"I'll ride over and talk to him," said Perry. "He's as stubborn as a mule, but I'll talk to him."

"I wish we'd never gone into this," Jimmy groaned. "The more I think of the complications we're sure to run into, the more scared I get. Suppose some of Bob Quennin's friends drop in? What're we going to tell 'em?"

"Jimmy," said Perry, "we've started acting first and thinking afterward. Let's not cross these bridges until we get to them. How long are these people going to stay?"

"God knows!" Jimmy moaned. "It's the first real vacation dad has had since he was a kid. He's getting a big kick out of it."

Perry thoughtfully puffed his cigarette.

"We can start a smallpox epidemic if we have to," he said presently. "All you need is some red paint. You daub it on anybody's face and put them to bed. That trick clears out guests faster than any stunt I know. But we'll save it as a last resort."

"We're apt to have to do something drastic before we're through. I feel it in my bones, Jimmy. That fellow Blick is poison to me, and he's got a mean look in his eye. You run back to the house, kid, and have a lot of fancy lies ready if they begin asking too many questions. I'll ride over to Saul's."

"Hurry back," Jimmy begged. "You know I can't handle this situation alone."

They shook hands, as men will who are facing doom. Jimmy returned to the house and Perry went on to the stable. As he saddled the buckskin, he made various and sundry remarks aloud, bearing upon the toughness of the situation and the dog-goned bone-headedness of some lonesome cowboys.

It is quite natural, quite human, for men who live much alone to voice their thoughts aloud.

"You," said Perry, "are nothing but a big sap. Oh, my Gawd, what a sap you are. Didn't you ever hear tell of a guy by the name of Don Quixote?"

"He tilted at windmills," stated a clear, musical voice behind him, and Perry jumped so suddenly that the startled buckskin almost backed through the stable wall.

Perry looked with angrily lustrous eyes at the small, slim girl who had come up, unseen and unheard, behind him. Her face was flushed. She had changed to snow white riding breeches and black riding boots. Her dark hair seemed to be skinned back tighter than before.

"What," she sweetly asked, "are you muttering about? What's wrong? Didn't you know that anger is bad for

the digestion, and that it puts lines in one's face?"

"This horse," said Perry, controlling himself, "is ornery."

"Liar," said Miss Van Dyne. "He's been standing there like a perfect lamb. Where are you going, Perry?"

Perry didn't like the freedom with which she used his name. On the long list of things he didn't like was anybody who called him by his first name the first time they met.

"On an errand," he curtly answered.

"Can I go along?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Van Dyne."

"Oh," said the flapper, "you can call me Nedra. It's quite all right. I always thought the West was so delightfully informal."

"The relation between a ranch foreman and his boss's guests," said Perry, "has got to be formal."

She looked up at him with large, curious eyes. She came a little closer to him, still holding him with her eyes. Perry felt vaguely uneasy. A deep, masculine instinct warned him that this pretty girl was determined to make a monkey out of him.

She was undeniably a little beauty. Her figure was slim but delicately rounded. She was charming. Something about her skinned-back dark hair made her alluring. She probably weighed ninety-eight pounds—and every ounce of it was inviting!

What was more to the point, she knew it. If she didn't, she was an idiot. And she was anything but an idiot. There was no doubt that her power over men was sweet to her. And Perry was fully aware that, despite their short acquaintance, she was using every atom of her power now to make a goat of him.

"Won't you have Midnight saddled, and let me go with you?"

"We'll go for a ride later," said Perry curtly. "This ride is over pretty tough country, and I have to ride fast."

He led Kid out of the stable, with

the flapper taking long strides to keep in step with him. He might have known that she was full of cute tricks. She kept her eyes on his face, but she was no longer smiling. Her expression was expectant but sober.

"Do you wear that pistol all the time?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Perry.

"Did you ever shoot a man?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did he die?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Her eyes were shining now. "I think," she exclaimed, "that you're the most romantic man I ever met! Oh, I love the West!"

She was, Perry found, standing so close to him that he would have only had to sway slightly to touch her. He next discovered that he was angry at her. He was angry because he was tingling. He was tingling because she was so near him. He wasn't going to let this flapper make a monkey of him. He'd put her in her place right now!

"When are the wedding bells going to peal forth?" he wanted to know.

With a look of surprise she answered: "What wedding bells?"

"Yours, and Mr. Blick's."

"Oh," she murmured, "those. Why, they aren't going to peal forth. What put that strange idea into your head, Perry?"

"This did, Miss Van Dyne," he answered savagely, and whipped from his shirt pocket the wallet containing the clipping.

Miss Van Dyne accepted the clipping. With the round eyes and mouth of a child she examined it. With wonderment she looked up at him.

"Where did this come from, Perry?"

"I clipped it out of a paper!" he snapped.

"But it's four or five months old!"

"I know it!"

"You mean," she said softly, "you've been carrying this in your pocket, next to your heart—for four

or five months?"

The deep red of indignation, of embarrassment, flooded Perry's manly countenance.

"I did not," he stammered. "It isn't—I won't— Look here—" he sputtered.

"But you did!" she squealed. "Oh, I think that's just too romantic for words! I'll give you one of my photographs. I'll wire for one immediately!"

"I don't want one," said Perry. "You misunderstood me. You leaped to the wrong conclusion, as women generally do. I carried that clipping because I've always been a great admirer of your uncle. Why should I carry around the picture of a girl who's engaged to another man? That would be silly, wouldn't it?"

"No," said the flapper, "it wouldn't be silly if you loved her."

"Well," said Perry with cruel, crushing finality, "I don't love her." He swung neatly into his saddle.

"But you will," cried the flapper. "You will!" she shouted as he started away. "I'll bet you a brand new saddle against a—a pair of silk stockings you will!"

She was trotting along beside the buckskin.

"I never bet on sure things," Perry told her, and touched Kid with the spurs. An inarticulate shriek followed him.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAN



OUT in the open, with the wind rushing past his cheeks, Kid's galloping hoofs drumming on the hard earth, a sense of peace and quiet stole over Perry. The thunder of galloping hoofs usually put him in harmony with the world. It had that effect now. There was something soothing and relaxing in the beat of galloping hoofs.

And you needed something mighty soothing after a tilt with a girl like Nedra Van Dyne. Why, she hadn't wasted a minute, not a second, in getting to work on him! He'd love her, would he? Hmph! A couple of hmphs! It now occurred to our knight of the saddle that he had seen, through the white silk shirtwaist she wore, the gleam of pink silk and of flesh nearly as pink.

He touched Kid with the spurs, and Kid, unaccustomed to such treatment, laid back his ears and flew. For a thousand yards he ran, with Perry making no attempt to check him. The drumbeat of the galloping hoofs was gradually soothing him. The blast of hot wind on his cheeks was clearing his brain.

When Perry reached the outbuildings of the O-Bar-S he was himself again. He found Oscar Saul breaking a young colt to the hackamore. Mr. Saul was a beefy, red-faced man of fifty, with thick gray hair and a mouth perpetually stained by the tobacco he chewed. It was his only vice. Oscar Saul was one of the wealthiest ranchers in the State. Unlike most ranchers, he was a hard-headed business man. He was anything but a sentimentalist.

He greeted Perry with warm cordiality.

"Well, I suppose you're goin' to try to sell me stock in some gold mine you discovered."

"I didn't find gold," said Perry.

"What are you aimin' to do now?"

"I'm working at the Circle-Q—foreman."

"The hell you are!" shouted Mr. Saul.

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Regardless and irrespective of the fact," went on Mr. Saul on a rising note of anger, "that you've had a permanent offer from me! You know damned well you'll get farther and get there faster with me than with Bob Quennin. You give me a pain in the ear!"



He continued to blow off steam for some time. Perry patiently waited for the gale to run its course, then said:

"You see, Mr. Saul, it's like this." And he proceeded to tell Mr. Saul what it was like.

The wealthy rancher took a fresh chew of tobacco. He interrupted once to say:

"I thought it was fishy, Jimmy owning a ranch, but I kept my mouth shut. Keeping my mouth shut has earned me a lot of money here and there."

"Will you keep on keeping it shut?"

"I hate lying, by deed or word," answered the stubborn Mr. Saul. "The way I look at this mess, Perry, Pierpont Van Dyne is going to find out sooner or later that he has been tricked, that his son is a worthless bum and a weakling."

"But Mr. Van Dyne is a sick man. I'm doing it for that. And Jimmy has promised to straighten up. Maybe he'll do it."

"Yes," grumbled the sardonic Mr. Saul, "and maybe that cow over there will give Mumm's extra-dry champagne. Well, I'll line up with you, Perry. I'll lie myself black in the face, but only because you're a nice fellow, and I'm fond of Pierpont. I promised him I'd come over and spend a few days. I'll ride over to-night or in the mornin'."

Perry returned to the Circle-Q with his heart riding high. Another obstacle had been met and overcome.

Supper was over when he reached the ranch house. But he did not eat alone. He was hardly through with his soup when Nedra came into the dining room smoking a cigarette. Perry was conscious all at once of sheer silk stockings, a wisp of a yellow dress.

Sourly he addressed himself: about enough goods in it to make a doll's handkerchief. He hated to admit that she had beautiful arms and shoulders, but she had. Well, what of it? She was Colton Blick's sweetie, and she

wasn't going to make a sucker out of him!

Nedra slipped into a chair beside Perry and examined him with adoring eyes.

"Was your errand successful?"

He looked at her and nodded in silence.

"You got away this afternoon," she said in a silky whisper, "before I could tell you something dreadfully important. I want you to know that I think you were awfully, awfully rude."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," said Perry in a voice that was anything but penitential.

"If you don't stop calling me ma'am," muttered the green-eyed flapper, "I'm going to find some dull, blunt implement to hit you with. I am not a school-teacher. I am approximately four years younger than you are, and I will not be 'ma'amed.'"

"Yes, ma'am," said Perry.

"Your sales resistance," she told him, flicking his face with angry green eyes, "is simply wonderful. But I'll get you yet."

Perry answered by laughing softly, insultingly. Miss Van Dyne colored angrily. Her eyes flashed. Her little girl's mouth became a straight line of menace.

"You think you're invulnerable, don't you?"

He nodded. "I sure do, to any flapper that breathes."

Her color deepened. The daggers in her eyes became broadswords.

"I'll have you understand, Perry Wilder, that I'm not a flapper. I'm a darned nice girl."

"With that haircut?" he jeered.

"Oh!" she helplessly wailed. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" She beat on the table with her fists. Dishes rattled. Ching Lee, at the hot stove in the corner, turned and revealed his teeth.

"Have haircuts anything to do with morals?" the girl demanded.

"They may be a symptom."

"I'll have you understand, darn you, that I had my hair cut short because I knew I wouldn't be near a barber for weeks!"

"Weeks!" Perry groaned. "Are you going to be here for weeks?"

"You're nothing but a brute! Yes, I am! Weeks and weeks and weeks! I intended staying only a week, but I've decided to stay weeks and weeks—" She choked.

"I thought you Western men were so chivalrous!" she sputteringly added.

"Well," Perry drawled, "who started this?"

"Who?" she cried. "You!"

"Me?"

"You did! You carried my picture next to your heart for five months. And you aren't man enough to admit you did it because you liked my face. Well, I certainly will not annoy you any longer. To be perfectly frank, you appealed to me. When I met you, I thought you were a peach—"

"Swish," said Perry.

"All right! Swish! I did! I'd never met a real Westerner before, in the garb of the real West. I'll admit you gave me an awful kick. We could have been wonderful friends. I've certainly been disillusioned."

"Pie," said Perry. "Pie."

"What do you mean, pie?"

"I was talking to Ching Lee."

"Allee light," said Ching Lee. "Pie."

And brought it.

Perry ate the pie in silence broken only by the ticking of the clock on the wall and the emotional breathing of the flapper.

"Would you fall for me," she asked presently, "if I let my hair grow?"

"I wouldn't fall for you," Perry answered, "if you let it grow to your knees. I wish you would lay off me. I like you fine, Miss Van Dyne, but I want you to stop making a monkey out of me. You rich girls think it's all right to make men fall for you, but what do the men get out of it?"

Her eyes narrowed. "What do you want out of it?"

"Nothing," Perry answered. "Absolutely nothing. I don't flirt. I'm an old-fashioned man. The reason I'm in this business is because I don't care much for modern civilized ways—flirting at the drop of the hat, drinking bum gin off the hip in a parked sedan, necking parties, jazz in all forms."

"I never," declared the girl with blazing eyes and cheeks, "have necked with any man. You absolutely misunderstand me. The reason I fell so hard for you was because you're what you look like. I don't approve of modern civilized ways, as you call 'em, any more than you do. Paste that in that No. 12 Stetson of yours. The trouble with you, Perry Wilder, is that you've got too much ego in your cosmos."

"You don't know," Perry mocked her. "You never saw my cosmos. And I'm not egotistical. I'm a modest man. I only refuse to be made a sucker of."

Miss Van Dyne banged on the table again. There were tears in her beautiful eyes. Her chin was quivering. Her lips looked feverish. All in the sacred cause of wrath.

"Will you please stop accusing me of trying to make a sucker or a monkey or a fool out of you? I—I hate you! I extend the hand of friendship, and what do I get in return? Slaps in the face!"

Perry laid down his napkin and turned to her. His blue eyes met her green ones straightly. He was pale. And he was solemn.

"Miss Van Dyne, I want to apologize for any uncourteous remarks I have made. I do not understand your type. I'm mighty grateful that you've put things on a sound basis. I want to accept the hand of friendship."

He reached out for her hand. She eyed him distrustfully. She resisted perceptibly when he took her hand. He pressed it gently but firmly. And released it.

Perry arose.

"I'll say good night. Good night, Miss Van Dyne."

The girl did not move. She lifted her face. The color had drained from it. It was a white, miserable face.

He went swiftly out the back door. His intention was to proceed directly to the bunk house, to have another talk with the hands. But he paused a few feet from the porch.

The eastern horizon was luminously pink. As he watched, the bright metallic edge of the moon appeared. He shivered slightly. Beauty, sheer beauty, affected him strongly. And it was a rarely beautiful night. Above him white stars shimmered and rippled against velvety blackness. A soft, warm wind, fragrant of hill flowers, of distant deserts, fanned his face. The moon rose higher and bathed the distant hills in fairyland colors.

Perry sighed. And his sigh was vaguely echoed. He was conscious of a tingling, of a deeper pounding in his chest.

Some one was standing close to him. A hand touched his arm and lingered. Faint perfume stole up to him.

A whisper said: "Oh, it's so beautiful!"

She moved until she stood in front of him, against him, the back of her head definitely against his chest.

"It almost scares you," she said.

Perry recalled the cynical counsel of Bob Quennin:

"She'll go out and look at the stars with you, and she'll sort of lean against you and say: 'My, aren't they close to-night! They just terrify me, they're so close.' And you'll comfort her and protect her from the nasty old stars."

"Perry." A sob. "Please don't hate me."

"I don't hate you."

"Call me Nedra."

The rising moon now cleared the mountains. It was egg-shaped and hotly red. Perry kept his arms at his sides.

"Life," she said in an impulsive voice as he hesitated, "hasn't been any too damned kind to me. When like meets like—"

"The only objection to that," Perry drawled, "is that you and I aren't alike."

"But we are!"

"I see it different. You're what we call a rich, high-born lady. You've got no business monkeying with me."

"There you go again! Monkeying! I'm not monkeying, Perry. You make me feel like a little fool. It isn't my fault that I fell in love with you the moment I saw you."

"You're engaged to marry Colton Blick," Perry said in a gritty voice.

"I'm not. I never said so. He's done all the talking. I wouldn't care if I never saw him again!"

A sharp voice from the doorway called: "Nedra! Are you out there?"

"That," Perry growled, "is your master's voice."

"Nedra," Colton Blick called, "we're waiting for you. Whom are you with?"

"It happens to be Perry Wilder."

"I told you," he said sharply, "I didn't want you to have anything to do with those cowhands. Come in at once."

"Perry," Nedra whispered, "if you'll saddle up two horses, I'll run away with you! I'll go anywhere you say! I'll show you whether I'm your kind or not!"

"Nedra!" snapped the Easterner.

"Perry!" This was a faint whimper.

"You'd better trot along," said the cowboy.

"Nedra!"

"I'm coming. I'll be right in." She whispered again, rapidly. "Perry, listen. I keep forgetting what I've been wanting to tell you. You must tell no one. It's about my uncle. He is sicker than any one realizes. His doctor talked to me before we left New York. His heart is very bad. He may live for years, yet some shock might kill

him. I wanted you to know. He must not be subjected to any shock. Good night, Perry!"

## CHAPTER VII

### GUILE OF THE SERPENT



PERRY resumed his walk to the bunk house. The beauty of the night was gone. Nedra Van Dyne had succeeded at last in getting under his skin.

Nothing but the strongest effort on the part of his will had prevented him from folding his arms about her when she had stood there, so close. He was, he told himself, only human, and the lure she exerted was all but irresistible.

Supposing he had taken her in his arms? Supposing he had kissed her? What then? Where did you go from there, with a girl like Nedra Van Dyne? You loved her. You burned yourself up loving her. That was the way it worked. But it wasn't love. It was passion.

"And I'm an idealist," he said aloud. Love was too cheap nowadays. And once you sold your love cheaply, you were sunk. You weren't fitted for the right kind, the enduring kind; you were always looking for more cheap love.

He saw a man walking toward the bunk house ahead of him. It was, he saw, as the man passed a window, Bill Manners, a man not without some reputation as a rodeo bull-dogger. Bill Manners went inside.

Perry smoked an entire cigarette, pondering, before he followed. When he went into the bunk house, deep silence greeted him. Men playing penny ante at a table looked up at him. Men lying in bunks looked at him. There was mystery in the air, constraint.

He said generally: "Well, fellows, how are things going?"

Bill Manners, lounging on the edge of a table, spoke up.

"They seem to be coming your way fine, Perry. But it just don't seem fair to everybody concerned, meanin' us, for you to play whole hog."

"I don't get that," said Perry, his smile departing.

"Oh, it's nuthin'," another of the men voiced himself. "It's just a question of when does somebody else get a chance to look into them limpid green eyes."

Perry stiffened.

"Who the hell says you haven't got a chance?" he snapped.

"Well," answered Bill Manners, "it looks to us as how you've got her roped off and branded already. She's a mighty cute little lady. Is there anything in the contract that says mebbe I ain't got the right to cuddle up to her?"

"Take a tip from me," said Perry, controlling himself, "and don't waste your time. She's one of these Eastern flappers whose best stunt is to make a sucker out of any man she meets."

"She looks like a hot mamma to me," stated Bill Manners.

"You might try finding that out for yourself," Perry snapped. "I'm offering no competition to anybody. Anyhow, she's engaged to that fellow Blick."

"Then just supposin'," said the bull-dogger, "that you step to one side like a nice young gentleman and give somebody else a chance. Ain't that fair?"

A dozen lusty voices assured him that it was eminently fair and just.

"We aim to play this game of keepin' the wool pulled down over the old gent's eyes," went on the bull-dogger. "But there ain't anything in it for us but what we can git. Now, me, f'r instance, I'm willin' to have a leetle love affair. But what chance have I got with this map of mine alongside a good looker like you?"

"What you're saying," said Perry, "is that you want me to step out of the picture and give you boys a clear field. That it?"



Bill Manners nodded. "You spit a dishful, Perry. We been talkin' it over. We're willin' to keep our mouths shut and play ball pretty, jest as long as you keep away from that little lady."

Perry grinned. "Nothing could give me greater pleasure. Consider me out of the picture."

"Stay out," growled a cowboy.

"You'll never know," Perry chuckled, "how musical your words are to my ears. Keep the little lady entertained, boys. Keep her away from me."

"Apple sauce!" snorted Bill Manners.

"I mean it," said Perry. "Keep her so busy she won't have a chance to bother me and you'll earn my undying gratitude. Believe me or not, I've got no time for women. Good night!"

He went out. The night was once again beautiful. The moon, now risen and white, shone down on a world all ebony and silver. On such a night as this—

"Perry! Perry! Is that you?"

A figure emerged from a black shadow. It was Jimmy. He bleated: "Did you see Saul?"

"I did. Everything is jake. He's coming to-night or to-morrow."

Jimmy whistled softly with relief. "They're playing cards in there. Dad is a gambling fool. I come by my gambling instincts naturally. He'll play poker every minute he has the chance. He's playing with Blick now, two handed, ten-dollar limit. I had to get away. My hands were just itching for those damned cards!"

"You wouldn't last long in a ten-dollar limit game," said Perry.

"I feel my luck has turned, Perry. I have a hunch I could sit in at that game and make a killing. Listen, Perry. What's going on between you and Nedra? I'm getting worried."

"You're wasting your time," said Perry. "There's nothing to worry about."

"She is absolutely cuckoo about you, Perry. She and Blick had an awful row a few minutes ago. She told him she'd met a real man at last, and she said the man was you. Don't monkey with that girl, Perry. She's a nice kid, but she's dangerous. Blick is sore, sore enough to fight. Watch your step!"

"I wouldn't care," said Perry, "if I never saw that girl again as long as I live!"

"Well, she's fallen hard for you. And Blick is sore enough to kill you. I think he's a bad customer, Perry. He'll watch you like a hawk, and, the first chance, he'll pounce!"

"I wish she'd never left New York!" Perry said bitterly.

"Try to keep away from her."

"You bet I will!"

"But you've got to stay around the ranch and run things. Otherwise, I'd say go out and ride fence, or something. When trouble comes, it's going to come from Blick. And if Blick should learn that we only borrowed this ranch to fool dad; that I'm nothing but a bum—"

"You mean, from her. Well, Jimmy, you can rest assured that I'll do everything in my power to avoid her. She's determined to make a monkey out of me, and I'm just not going to let her."

"That's fine," breathed Jimmy. "Well, good night. We men must stick together."

The two young men, once again faced by doom, shook hands. It was as if each were to be led before a firing squad at dawn.

Jimmy walked away. Perry departed at an angle along a path which took him to the small cottage which Bob Quennin had erected for a former foreman who had had a wife and several children. It was now Perry's solitary abode.

The weary cowboy was at the steps before he was aware that his veranda was occupied. A girl was seated on

the railing, her slim legs entwined about a post.

"Oh, my Gawd!" Perry groaned.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TANGLED WEB



HE delectable flapper untwined her legs and dropped lightly to the ground. She lifted her oval face to him. With its luminous pallor it might have been powdered with star dust. Her eyes caught glints from the plump silver moon over Perry's left shoulder.

"I'm supposed to be in bed," she said simply, "but I had to see you just once more. And it's such a heavenly night."

"You ought to be in bed," said Perry with equal simplicity.

"That makes it unanimous. My uncle wants me in bed. Colton wants me in bed. Jimmy wants me in bed. There seems to be a conspiracy to put me to bed. But I had to see you. I think this is the darlinest house."

"I've just had a talk with Jimmy—"

"Yes," she stopped him, "I heard every word you said."

"You mean—every word?" he gasped.

"Yes, darling, every."

"Then you know—you gleaned—"

"Perry, I'm one of the world's best little gleaners. It has been forced upon my young intellect that this whole thing is a farce, a sham, a fraud; that this ranch is borrowed to fool my uncle; that Jimmy is nothing but a bum. But that doesn't concern me half so much as the things you said about me. You wish you'd never see me again as long as you live, do you?"

Perry was too dazed to say anything. He had thrust his hands feebly into his pockets. Now he removed them to place them on his lean hips. Now he let them hang at his sides. Next he folded them on his breast. The

beans were spilled!

She came closer to him and stood on tiptoes.

"You wish I'd never left New York, do you?"

"Um—ah—glub," said Perry.

"You'll do your damndest to keep away from me, will you?"

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy, Lordy," moaned the cowboy.

"Just for that," said the flapper, "do you know what you're going to do?"

"No," groaned her shivering victim, "what are you going to do?"

"I said you, not me."

"Well, me, then. What price do I pay?"

"Angel, you seal my lips with a kiss!"

"Not this cowboy. No, ma'am!"

"I suppose," she said thoughtfully, "the best thing I can do, after all, is to walk in and tell my uncle the truth. The shock would probably kill him, but his death would be on your head, not mine. Yes," she added in a low, firm voice, "I'm going in there and tell him."

"Wait a minute," the young man begged. "Won't you be reasonable?"

"To quote your own words, no woman is reasonable. And I'm nothing but a weak woman, weaker than most."

"I'll pay the price," Perry surrendered.

"You're so brave!" she mocked him.

"Yes, you'll make the big sacrifice! You'll kiss me. Well—" She giggled.

"Get it over with, darling."

Perry dried his lips carefully with the back of his hand. He made a face as if he had tasted vinegar. The flapper's large bright eyes glowed up into his. She lifted her face. The martyr lowered his.

He deposited upon her lovely mouth what might be described as a step-brotherly kiss. He straightened up quickly and wiped his mouth with the back of his other hand.

"No," said the green-eyed girl. "That wasn't fair. If that was a kiss, I'm a grandmother. Do it properly or I'll tattle."

"But what does it prove?" Perry demanded. "You're just making a monkey out of me."

"I haven't time just now," Nedra answered, "to go into details. I mean, life is too short, and I detest explanations and confessions. I'll say simply that time is precious, and that you are the first man I have ever met whom I'm absolutely confident I could truly and honestly love. If you don't fall for me, I'm lost. No, angel, I'm not joking. It is absolutely essential to the peace and security of my future that you fall in love with me."

"I'll not be made a—"

"Monkey of," Nedra sweetly finished for him. "You are not, on my word of honor, being made a monkey of. Is chivalry dead in the far-flung spaces of the great American West, too? I won't have it so. I, a helpless young girl, am throwing myself on your mercies."

"It doesn't make sense," Perry muttered.

"Kiss me properly," the young lady said firmly, "and try not to use your brain. You'll wear the poor thing out. I'm giving you an opportunity to be a knight in shining honor, to save me from a fate worse than death, and—"

"Cut it out," Perry growled. "Make it mean something. What is all this chatter about being lost if I don't fall for you, about the peace and security of your future?"

"You are saving me from the clutches of Colton Blick."

Perry snorted. The light of the moon struck a silver curve along the clean long line from ear to jaw. The girl's upturned face still had the gleaming quality of a star.

It was mad business, and he felt quicksands under his feet.

He said savagely: "Stop being silly."

She retorted: "I am as serious as death."

"You don't need me," he snorted, "to save you from anybody's clutches. Stop talking like a cheap novel."

"But I am dealing, Perry, with facts. I won't go into details. I refuse to go into details. I want you to take me on my word. You have to. I mean, you have to accept me. Now, kiss me properly."

"Why?" he snapped.

"Because I'll tattle if you don't. Put your arms around me."

Perry put his arms around her. He felt himself trembling at the elbows and knees. She was soft and yielding.

"Tighter!" she commanded.

He held her more tightly. Her eyes were white fire, mad fire. It occurred to Perry that she was crazy.

"Now—kiss me."

He did not get off so easily. He lowered his face, and as he did so she flung her arms around his neck. Her lips were greedy. He tried to free himself, but she hung on. He tried to fling her off, but she clung. He presently placed his hands under her arms and pushed. Pushing her away, he held her away. He was dizzy.

She was softly laughing.

"You're—just—crazy!" he said.

"Love is just craziness," she told him. "And you love me, a little now, don't you?"

"No," said the cowboy. "No—dog-gone your little hide!"

There were tears in her eyes now. She whimpered:

"You're just a brute. Any decent man would help a girl when she asked for it."

"Not the way you ask for it!"

"There wasn't any other way. You treat me like a worm. You've got to save me from him. It may sound like a cheap novel, but I've got to act fast. Do you dare tell me now that you don't care for me the least little bit?"

"Why do I have to save you from him?"

"Because I'll jump off a cliff if you don't!"

"Nedra!" sounded a voice.

The girl jumped. She whispered:

"You see? He's after me now. It's been like this for the past two years. Persecution!"

"You're free, white, and twenty-one," said Perry. "Tell him to go to the devil."

"I do, a dozen times a day. He won't go to the devil."

"Nedra!" The voice of Colton Blick was nearer. It was also angry.

"I'm going to hide!" she panted.

"Where can I hide?"

Without waiting for an answer, she ran around the side of the cottage. Perry lighted a cigarette. His mind was chaotic. Oh, for a fast horse between his legs and a fine, large desert at his disposal!

The tall, athletic figure of Colton Blick came into the moonlight. The spark of Perry's cigarette brightened and waned. He casually flicked away a tiny ash as the Easterner strode up to him.

"Where is Miss Van Dyne?"

"How do I know?" Perry curtly answered. "I'm not keeping books for Miss Van Dyne."

"She was here. You were talking to her."

"You're imagining things," said Perry.

"I heard voices."

"You're apt to hear anything on a night like this. Ghosts walk on a night like this. You heard the wind in the trees."

Colton Blick placed his hands on his hips. His jaw was thrust forward. His teeth were parallel white streaks in his dark face.

"I want to have an understanding with you, cowboy. Keep away from that girl. Hands off."

"How," Perry coldly inquired, "would you like to mind your own damned business?"

The Easterner lifted his right hand

from his hip. His eyes were nothing more than twin black slashes under his forehead.

"My business," he said, in a controlled voice, "is to keep that girl away from unprincipled cowhands. I'm well acquainted with your type. Your type is apt to misconstrue the friendliness of a girl of her type. I'm giving you fair warning. Keep away from her."

"Meaning," Perry drawled, "she's yours?"

"Meaning," the other slowly answered, "she's mine."

"She doesn't," Perry said lightly, "seem to be fully aware of that fact."

"Did she tell you that?" Blick snapped.

"She seems," Perry drawled, "to have the same opinion of you that I'm rapidly getting—that you're a damned pest."

Colton Blick drew in his breath through locked teeth. He slowly brought up his right hand with forefinger extended. It was aimed like a gun barrel at Perry's heart.

"I won't bicker with a cowhand," he said quietly. "I'm giving you warning. If you're not a damned fool, you'll act on it. Keep away from that girl. Let me see you with her once again, and there'll be trouble. Good night."

Perry flicked his cigarette stub into the air, saw it rise into the moonlight, saw the tiny red explosion as it struck the earth.

Colton Blick was walking rapidly toward the ranch house.

The weary cowboy slowly ascended the veranda steps. He turned back for a final glimpse of the star-rippling sky. Once again, all beauty was gone from the night. It was a stark creation of inky black and white, carved by a moon devoid of feeling. He let himself into the small parlor of the cottage. He switched on a light. A small voice said:

"I liked the way you talked to him,



Perry. I couldn't love a man who didn't stand up on his hind legs and defend his rights!"

Nedra was seated in a rocking chair, slowly rocking, with her hands folded in her lap.

Perry sagged with a sigh of exhaustion against the closed door.

"I don't see," he complained, "why you go out of your way to cause trouble. Won't you please let me alone?"

Rocking slowly, Nedra gravely regarded him. Her eyes ran slowly from his tousled light-brown hair, along his nose to his mouth, down his bright plaid shirt to his chaps and high-heeled boots. The sparkling silver spurs seemed to fascinate her. She sighed.

"I decided to tell you the details," was her answer. "That's why I sneaked in the back door and waited. I think this is a darling cottage. Wouldn't it be wonderful, Perry, if we had a cute little love nest like this on a ranch of our own?"

"You see, I have it all nicely worked out. I know a lot about you. Jimmy has been telling on you. He says you'd be one of the most successful ranchers in the whole West if you'd just settle down. He says you know horses and cattle better than any man in the State. What you need is a good, steady influence like me."

"Steady!" Perry hollowly echoed.

"I meant stimulating. Yes, a good, stimulating influence like me. I'll bet we'll make the old cow world sit up and take notice!"

Perry, in spite of himself and the sourness that at present was spoiling his life, laughed.

"I wonder," he said, "if you Eastern girls, especially the ones who are born with a silver spoon in your mouth—"

"Meaning me?" she stopped him, indicating herself with a small pink thumb.

"I wonder if you girls, who are used to limousines longer than box

cars, and silk sheets and solid silver and old family servants, realize what it's really like to start a ranch. I just wonder!"

Her smile was bright. "Go on, angel, and wonder some more. I am absolutely fascinated."

"You go to the movies and you read the novels," Perry grimly obliged her, "and you think of life on a ranch as a beautiful picture—handsome cowboys, romance, the great open spaces where the skies are bluer."

"Well, the skies are pretty swish," the delectable flapper encouraged him. "And you are certainly a handsome cowboy."

"What you don't see is the heart-breaking struggle for bare existence," Perry went on. "You don't see yourself cooking and doing washing and chopping wood and hauling water."

"Perry, you aren't going to let me carry water or chop wood! You adore me too much for that!"

"Look at those hands!" snorted the cowboy.

"Well," said the flapper as she raised her hands and examined them as if she had never seen them before, "what's the matter with my hands? Good, capable, serviceable hands, ready to be worked to the bone for my big, handsome rancher!"

"It's a kind of disease," said Perry, still gazing at those little pink-and-white hands. "Some girls get it worse than others. You've got the worst case of it I ever saw."

"What?" she demanded.

"Ranch-itis," said Perry. "It's a disease of the romantic nerve. You sure have got it bad."

"So have you!"

"I grew up right here in this valley," said Perry. "I love it. Well, why don't you start a ranch? With your income you could have a dandy dude ranch and wear chaps and talk big to your Eastern friends about your herds of cattle."

"Wait a minute," said Nedra.

"Let's get this straight. Did you say income?"

"I sure did."

"But I haven't any income."

"Well, you've got a wealthy dad somewhere."

"You're mistaken. Darling, these are the gruesome details I've been side-stepping. I'm a working girl. I haven't an income, except what I earn. I haven't a rich dad, or any kind of dad. He died when I was still covered with fuzzy feathers. Or a mother, either. Or any relatives in the world except Uncle Pierpont and Cousin Jimmy. Now what do you think of that?"

"I don't believe it," Perry answered.

"Yes, I've noticed that you have a corner on skepticism. I am a truthful woman. I am a stenographer in my uncle's office. My life has not been a bed of roses. My uncle has little or no use for women. He was badly stung once, and he's never forgotten her or forgiven the sex. Taking me on this trip is the first really big-hearted gesture he's ever made in—my life. Give me a cigarette."

Perry gave her a cigarette and held a match for her. It was trembling.

"So, just get it out of your mind, angel, that work and I are strangers. I think it would be swell to have a ranch. I think I could make you settle down and behave. Well, where's our ranch?"

"I wish," Perry answered, "that you'd stop talking nonsense and go to bed. Your sweetie will be back here again, and more hell will pop."

"He isn't my sweetie. Will you please remember that? He has been hounding me for two years. He has never once kissed me. Nonsense? Listen to me, Perry Wilder. I've been looking men over for quite a few years. Not until this afternoon, when you came into my life all dolled up like a rainbow, did my heart ever turn a backflip and say: 'There he is, sister!'"

Perry shook his head. Speech was deserting him again.

"It takes two people to make a love affair," the audacious beauty informed him. "So far it's been too one-sided. But one of these days it will be unanimous."

Nedra sprang up with bright, excited eyes as the sound of trampling hoofs occurred outside the cottage.

"Who is it?" she exclaimed. "Bandits?"

"Probably some lonesome cowboy looking for a bunk," said Perry. "He'll be coming in here. You'd better beat it."

Before he could prevent her, she had placed her hands on his shoulders, pulled herself up and kissed him freshly on the mouth.

"Good night, angel! I'll go out the back door. Do dream of me. Honestly, I'm an awfully nice girl. I know my boldness is appalling, but isn't it all right when I confine it just to you? And if you only knew how delirious a girl feels when she's finally met the one man in the world she—"

There was a sharp knock at the door. The flapper flew.

Oscar Saul walked in, wearing a sardonic smile. He looked curiously about the room.

"I thought I heard voices," he drawled. "I could have sworn I heard a woman's voice."

Perry heard the back door close.

"It's the night," he explained. "I've been hearing voices until I'm nearly loco."

The owner of the O-Bar-S gave him a sharp, searching glance and said nothing more on the subject.

"It's so late I hated to wake up the folks at the house, and I thought maybe you had better give me a little dress rehearsal in this livin' lie I'm goin' to be part of. Can you put me up here?"

"I can," Perry answered. "There's a big double bed for you."

"You look," said the rancher, "as if you'd been takin' a ride in a cream

separator. Your eyes look wild. And what are you sweating so hard for? I swear, I never seen you look so upset, Perry. And look how mussed up your hair is!

"And what's that red on your cheek there? That ain't lipstick or rouge, is it? Don't tell me you've gone and got yourself messed up with some woman! No, sir! Don't tell me that, because I look on you as one of the strongest and stanchest members of the anti-woman society!"

Perry grinned faintly. He rubbed his cheek so briskly with his brown hand that it turned fiery red.

"I'm still a charter member of the anti-woman society," he assured the hardened bachelor. "And, what's more, I'm always going to be."

"That's better," said Mr. Saul. "How are things goin'?"

"Fine!" Perry answered. "Just lovely! If a star fell down and hit me on the back of the neck, they'd be just perfect. Mr. Van Dyne's niece is a member of the party, and she's a romantic girl with a cowboy complex. She's made up her little mind to turn me into a monkey on a string. And, what's more, she's making good on the job."

"You're too good lookin'," growled Mr. Saul. "Women always fall for you tall, slim, reckless lookin' guys. Why don't you let a horse step on your face and spoil your beauty? Your eyes 've got too much hell in 'em. Your face is too much like a piece of sculpture. You belong in the middle of a nice big desert."

"That's just where I wish I was," said Perry.

"Well, what else has been goin' wrong?"

"This flapper's *fiancé*, although she disclaims he's hers, is a fire-eating fool. He's got it into his head that I'm givin' his sweetie a rush, and he's ready to commit murder. He also claims he's going for a ride on Kid."

"He has my deepest sympathy," commented Mr. Saul. "Go on. What else has been goin' wrong?"

"All the hands are jealous of me, because the flapper has been payin' so much attention to me. They're going to squeal if I don't let her alone and give them a chance. So I promised to let her alone. And on top of that, what does she do but find out that this ranch business is a put up job, and she says if I don't pay devoted attention to her, *she'll* squeal."

"So if I don't keep away from her the cowhands will squeal, and if I do keep away from her, she will squeal. As a sort of frosting on the cake, Jimmy's dying for a drink and itching to get at the cards. Aside from all that, everything is just dandy."

Oscar Saul ejected a stream of brown juice with marvelous accuracy through the doorway. It cleared the veranda steps and landed well beyond. He turned back and sadly shook his head.

"You poor fish!" he said, shifting his cud to the other cheek. "You think you're in trouble now, do you? Take it from an expert who's lived and slept and et with trouble all his life, your real troubles ain't even started. Go to bed and get some sleep. You're goin' to need all your strength and bubbly youth for what's comin'!"

THE CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT OF THIS GALLOPING, AMUSING SERIAL  
WILL APPEAR IN THE OCTOBER MUNSEY

#### GOLDENROD

Now that the blooms of summertime are blighted  
Where lanes are long and dingle paths are deep,  
Behold the torches that the sun has lighted  
To guide the year unto the bourn of Sleep!

Clinton Scollard

# The Faith Healer

By E. K. Means



*Strange Things Happened in Tickfall  
When an Exponent of a New School  
of Religious Thought Tried Her Wiles  
Upon the Pillars of the Shoofly Church*



IN the early morning, Little Bit, the diminutive factotum of the Henscratch soft drink emporium, was pursuing a leisurely and reluctant way toward his day's work. He lingered to hurl a rock at a bird, and missed it. He turned aside to catch a chameleon, which eluded him. He lifted a big stone to see if he could find any "baits," but the early worm must have been caught by an earlier bird than Little Bit.

His slow walk brought him to the rear of the Gaitskill home, an imposing residence owned by the richest man in town. The boy paused and sniffed. Every colored person believes that his nose knows. Little Bit was acquainted with the cook in that kitchen, because the lady was his mother. He wondered if she would not comfort him with some hot biscuit and "a few sirup."

Suddenly there was a series of shrieks, blatant and ear splitting, which indicated that two colored ladies, or

possibly more than two, had begun a fight. With quickened interest Little Bit climbed the fence and drew near to witness the fracas. The kitchen door opened, and a fat woman wearing a white apron and cap, and armed with a tin dipper, rushed out on the rear lawn. She was hotly followed by a maid who brandished a long loaf of stale bread, the dough plaited like a rope and tapering at each end, with a crust as hard as a turtle shell. The two danced around the cistern, shrieked like maniacs, and beat each other over the head with these deadly weapons.

The chauffeur ran out of the garage and embraced the fat cook with both arms, seeking to restrain her. He hauled her backward, bawling admonitions for peace; but her dimensions were too much for him, and she dragged him around with her and made him *particeps criminis* in the fray. Another negro came from the dairy with a bucket of warm, fresh milk in each hand. He set his burden down, and seemed pleased at the op-



portunity to seize the maid around her slender waist and try to tug her away.

Despite the Biblical beatitude spoken of the peacemakers, those well meaning individuals generally get it in the neck in this world of woe and sin; and so it happened in this case. The chauffeur and the man from the dairy received most of the punishment, and there were awful howls while they rubbed themselves where the dipper and the head loaf had hit them.

In the midst of the fray the whirling dervish quartet collided with the two milk buckets and kicked them over, and a foaming white flood deluged the middle of the yard. Half a dozen hound dogs had been following the maid around, snatching up the pieces of bread that broke off as she battered the heads of her opponents. Now they fell ankle deep in the milk and began to lap it up.

However, the accident stopped the fight. There was a groan of horror from the four participants in the battle. The colored milkman, who had lived among the Louisiana French people until the art of expressing emotion by anatomical gesture was second nature to him, stood with his shoulders shrugged up above his ears, his arms stiffened, his hands spread out, and his fingers extended, surveying the disaster with eyes which popped from his head like a bug's.

The poor milkman now became the center of attraction and an object of pity and condolence. The belligerents crowded around him, offering sympathy, and their voices crooned like the tones of a mother comforting a child. The cook and the maid got on either side of the unfortunate man, put their arms around him, and assisted him to a bench under a fig tree. The fat cook patted his cheek. The slender maid seated herself on his knee and hugged him, and this seemed to afford him much consolation.

In a few moments a reaction set in. Tiny wrinkles formed around the

milkman's eyes, and he chuckled and hugged the maid. They all broke into a roar of laughter, which swelled into crescendo shrieks of delight. The four sprang up and danced merrily, and the fat cook embraced the slender maid. The two men combined their arm lengths and managed to embrace the cook, and both men kissed the maid. The delighted girl seized the handle of the broken dipper and punched the cook in the stomach with exuberant joy.

To an innocent bystander, to a mere onlooker, this reconciliation bore striking resemblance to a resumption of the fight. It was so interpreted by Mrs. Gaitskill, who just then came out of a side door and walked across the lawn. She was a tall, silver-haired woman, whose patrician face was as luminous as an alabaster bowl with a lamp in it, and whose manner and bearing were the full expression of the inflexible pride and breeding of the old South. The four colored people saw her and subsided in shamed silence.

Mrs. Gaitskill spoke quietly. A mere man hearing her speech would wonder why he was a dumb devil who had to resort to profanity, when a gentle, well-bred woman could use such blazing, blistering language without raising her voice or uttering an oath.

The cook and the maid were discharged, and Little Bit heard this with a groan, for there was no hope of hot biscuits and sirup now. The milkman listened to a few remarks that reduced him, in his own estimation, to the size of one of the lacteal germs which now floundered helplessly in the puddles of spilled milk wasted on the ground. The chauffeur was told to go and secure three servants, the women named being the wives respectively of our old friends Vinegar Atts, Pap Curtain, and Figger Bush. They must come at once, Mrs. Gaitskill added, for there was to be a big dining that evening.

The mention of these three men reminded Little Bit of his duty at the

Henscratch. He quickly decided that the show was over, and that he would slink away before Mrs. Gaitskill told him a few words.

He had kept himself invisible to the discomfited combatants, and he desired to remain unseen by the conqueror who held the field. He dropped down upon his hands and knees and began to crawl, concealing himself behind a convenient hedge of boxwood. His progress was slow, and by the time he had reached the street, where he could resume an upright posture, he was overtaken by the discharged maid. She was walking rapidly, in angry mood, and talking aloud to herself.

"I'm sorry you an' maw got de gate, Yawie," Little Bit said, as he fell in step beside her. "Dat wus shore a noble fight, an' I wus proud to see it; but dat white woman was sho' a outspoke female!"

"Gawsh!" Yawie snarled. "I would hate to hear de woman speak whut kin outspoke her!"

"I think she got you an' maw wrong," Little Bit remarked.

"Suttinly. Dat's whut makes me so mad," Yawie said. "She let us fight till we kissed an' made up, an' den she come out an' fired us. I tried to git revengeance by stealin' somepin befo' I left out, but I didn't hab no time. I couldn't git my hands on nothin' but a box of candy mints; an' I jes' nachelly deespize dese here mints. You want 'em?"

"Suttinly, I loves 'em," replied Little Bit, holding out his hand for the little oblong box. "Thank'ee, ma'am."

A block farther down the street they parted, going different ways. Little Bit moved on toward the Henscratch; but when he passed the building occupied by the negro lodge of the village he could resist the appeal of the candy mints no longer. He was a gluttonous boy, and he had been denied his breakfast of biscuit and sirup; so he lifted a handful of the white disks from the box, thrust them into his cavernous

mouth, and swallowed them with but little preliminary mastication.

Then something happened. There was an internal explosion, and the youth uttered a frightened squall. The white tablets dissolved and came boiling up into his throat in a white foam like soapsuds. He wiped the froth from his lips and spat the foam upon the ground, but the fountain kept spouting, and he trembled with terror.

He was sure he was poisoned, but he dared not make outcry or appeal for help; nor could he inquire what was the poison he had eaten, for he was a receiver of stolen goods.

He crawled through the fence in the rear of the old lodge building and laid himself down under a tree to die.

## II

"DAR is a new kind of doctor in town, niggers," the Rev. Vinegar Atts remarked, as he sat down at the table beside the other three members of the Big Four, an organization which had functioned for years in the Henscratch.

"Dis am a awful healthy town," Pap Curtain replied. "People don't often git sick, and whut do git ailin' mighty seldom die. I's a gravedigger by trade, an' I ain't dug but one grave dis whole endurin' year, an' dat was a little one; an' now here comes another doctor to make it harder yit fer me to make a livin'!"

"Dis new doctor is gwine put you out of bizness complete," Vinegar laughed. "It's a new kind of talk to me, but it sounds resomble."

"Whut is dis here new doc?" Skeeter inquired. "We's got a allopath in town, an' we's got a homeopath, an' we done been had a osteopath, an' somebody said dat all dese here paths lead but to de grave. We needs a new path whut leads somewhar else, even ef Pap do hab to sell peanuts fer a livin'."

"Dis doctor don't heal by no path, but by faith," Vinegar informed them. "He specifies accawdin' to de Bible.

'Ef thou wilt believe, thou shalt be made whole,' de Book say."

"Believe whut?" Figger Bush asked.

"Believe you ain't sick," Vinegar told him.

"Whut in de name of mud do a feller want to be cured well fer, ef he believes he ain't sick?" Figger howled.

"I dunno," Vinegar answered feebly, mopping his bald head with a large bandanna handkerchief. "I ain't went into de bizness up to dat point. I jes' listened an' got a earful of whut folks is sayin', an' I went away to repote to you."

"It must be some kind of patent medicine fake," Skeeter announced. "I went into dat bizness once. I invented a medicine good fer man an' beast. It wus a big bottle, an' it had a cute label on it whut told you how much to take three times per each day befo' meals."

"Old stuff!" Pap Curtain snarled. "Ain't us got a law in de Big Four dat nobody ain't never to tell nothin' dat he done, because he's done told it a millyum times befo'? Shut up!"

"Say!" Figger Bush demanded. "Does you mean to tell me dat a doctor kin cure a toothache by makin' me believe dat de tooth don't ache?"

"Naw," Vinegar explained; "but ef you believe dat de tooth don't ache, why, it jes' nachelly won't ache."

"Dat's a lie!" Figger howled. "Once I had de toothache—"

"Dat's agin de rule!" Skeeter snapped. "Shut up!"

"I don't b'lieve dat a-tall!" Pap Curtain announced. "Now las' week I wus fishin' over on de Coolee Bayou, an' I sot down on a catfish—"

"Shut up!" the other three men whooped in a chorus.

"Well, anyhow, mebbe we will all come to understand dat belief better by an' by," Vinegar Atts said. "I'm jes' tellin' you de news."

"Le's go down an' cornverse dat pusson a little while," Pap Curtain sug-

gested. "Ef I's gwine to be put out of bizness as a gravedigger, I wants to know it, so I kin begin to save up my money to buy me a whitewarsh brush an' a lime bucket."

"I cain't go," Skeeter Butts said. "Dat Little Bit whut he'ps me keep dis place ain't come to wuck dis mawn-in', so I got to stay here an' jerk soda."

"Here comes dat little coon now," Vinegar announced, gazing through the open door.

When Little Bit entered, all of them saw at once that the boy had not come sooner because he was sick. He was the color of wet ashes. His eyes seemed to have fallen back into his head, his thick lips were in a continual pout, and he was bent almost double, with both hands pressed hard upon his stomach.

"Whut ails you, Little Bit?" Vinegar demanded.

"Sick—sick to my stomick," the little darky replied.

Vinegar turned and looked at his friends with the light of a great idea blazing in his eyes.

"Dis is whar we give de new nigger doctor a try-out, fellers!" he said. "Le's take dis little coon down to the office an' git him started back on de road to recovery. Ef he gits well, us has done a good deed. Ef he don't git well, Tickfall ain't gwine mourn de loss of much."

"Ain't dat so?" Pap Curtain agreed. "Us is all wid you."

The four men escorted the ailing youth down the street. He asked no questions. He was glad that somebody was interested in him, and welcomed any chance of relief.

They stopped at a house which consisted of a single room, and which had once been used as a barber shop. For a long time the barber had contented himself with shaving faces and cutting hair; but then, becoming ambitious, he began to specialize in the use of a preparation known as "anti-kink," and to give his attention exclusively to

the beautification of the female face divine. In a little while he had to move away from his humble quarters and secure a much larger place for the accommodation of his customers, and he changed the name of his place of business and called it a "beauty parlor."

Upon the door of his former establishment, which had been for rent for a long time, there now appeared a new sign—"Dr. Bebe Gatt."

"Dat's a good, high-soundin' name," Skeeter said, as they walked up the steps of the little porch in front of the place. "Name sounds like the feller is somebody or another."

Within they found a curtain partition dividing the room, and they sat down to wait, presuming that the doctor was busy. They turned so that they could stare through the open door at the familiar scene outside, and they did not notice that some one had stepped noiselessly from behind the curtain.

After awhile Vinegar turned to see if there was any sign of activity behind the partition. He discovered that their number had been augmented by the addition of one.

"Huh!" he grunted, glaring at the intruder.

The person was a female whom Vinegar could not recall ever having seen in Tickfall; but she had the air of one who knew that she belonged in the office and was a resident of the town.

The other men turned around when they heard Vinegar's grunt of surprise; and they, too, stared in astonishment. The woman before them was one of a kind from which you might expect almost anything—a long, limp, droopy lady, with hair that stood out all over her head like the hirsute adornment of the Circassian beauty in a circus. It was apparent that she patronized the beauty parlor and had great confidence in the efficacy of anti-kink.

She looked at the four men with big, mournful, droopy eyes, ignoring the

youth called Little Bit as too insignificant to figure in her scheme of things. Her mouth was puckered in the way that "spiritual" women, white and black, have when they are preparing to say "soulful" things; but she was wearing a big hat with a big and worldly feather, and she had a pink dress which spoke of a mind not above mundane considerations. She was evidently intent upon making a picture against the flowered curtain, for she stood poised and motionless, her hands clasped under her chin.

The men concluded that she was a patient of the new doctor, and had just emerged from the consultation room behind the curtain. As she did not speak and they had not been introduced, there was a silence of three or four minutes. Then Skeeter ventured:

"Ef we have to wait much longer, I reckon I'll go out an' hunt me somepin to eat. You feel like a few vittles, Little Bit?"

"Lawd, no!" Little Bit sighed. "Dis am one day when I ain't gwine to enjoy somepin to eat."

"Oh!" the woman exclaimed. "Is one of you sick? Is you come to see de doctor?"

"Suttinly!" Pap Curtain snarled. "You reckon us four bizness men is left all our important matters, an' come here whar we don't know nobody, jes' to set down an' rest our foots? Dis little nigger is so sick dat it took all fo' of us to fotch him here."

"It ain't so!" the woman said in a soft, cooing tone, about as one would speak to a pet rat. "He ain't sick. I am Dr. Bebe Gatt, an' I will send him away happy in no time."

The Big Four looked at Dr. Bebe Gatt with a shock of surprise which almost unsettled their minds. Their instantaneous and unanimous impression was that there was something wrong with this arrangement. They had known only one female doctor of the colored race, and she had not been like Dr. Gatt. No physician they had



ever seen was like Dr. Gatt; and they did not believe that a real pill and powder artist would wear a dress like that or have such a mushy look upon her face.

She walked over to Little Bit, who sat all doubled over, with both hands pressed hard upon his middle.

"My dear, sweet little boy!" she cooed, putting her hand under his chin and lifting his bowed head as if she was getting ready to kiss him. "De Lawd has promised good to you!"

"I knows dat," Little Bit replied, expectorating a foamy substance upon the floor at his feet. "Git me some med'cine quick. I'm poisoned!"

"You don't need no med'cine, my chile," Dr. Gatt gurgled. "Pain is nothin' when de Lawd gibs his promise—"

"De Lawd knows my stomick hurts, all right," Little Bit interrupted, wiping from his lips a white spume which made him look as if he had swallowed a shaving brush and had left the soapy end sticking out. "He'p me quick, befo' I spit cotton till I die!"

"Yes, but you must rely upon de promise," Dr. Gatt informed him in dulcet tones. "Count yo' blessin's, name 'em one by one—"

"I ain't countin' nothin'!" Little Bit wailed. "An' ef you craves to name somepin, you name de name of de poison I done et, whut disagrees wid my insides so powerful!"

"Let de mem'ry of yo' blessin's prevail over de pain of de present," Dr. Bebe Gatt cooed.

"De pain ain't in my mem'ry," Little Bit howled. "It's in my stomick, whar my vittles goes when I eats 'em!"

"I'm skeart dis little boy will be a difficult patient," Dr. Gatt remarked sweetly. "It 'pears like he ain't got but one idear in his mind. My treatment is fer folks of de fust awder of intelligence, an' you kin see—"

She broke off with a gesture of helplessness, and the men nodded their comprehension. She had conveyed to

each of them the flattering impression that if he were sick her healing process would be immediate. They thanked her for the compliment. They were of the first order of intelligence.

"Let me out'n dis bughouse!" Little Bit howled, springing to his feet. "I'll git bats in my belfry stayin' here! I'm gwine out an' hunt a he-doctor!"

### III

WHEN Little Bit had gone, the four men sat wondering what to do next. They were trying to comprehend what they had heard, and they found it difficult. They were not sure that they had heard all of it exactly right, and there seemed to be some things left out. It was like trying to find the right word in a puzzle. In the case of Vinegar Atts the intellectual effort was so great that he began to rub the top of his bald head, as if to allay the agony of unaccustomed thought.

"Is yo' noble head troublin' you?" Dr. Gatt asked.

"It ain't no killin' matter," Vinegar replied. "My head ain't felt exactly right since you begun to talk to dat little nigger boy; but I reckon it don't amount to much. I feels like my brains is scrambled."

"Of course, it don't amount to nothin'," Dr. Gatt said, teetering over to Vinegar on her toes, and draping her slender, droopy figure over him like the wings of an angel. "It does not even exist."

"I always knowed Vinegar's head wusn't dar," Pap Curtain put in.

"Whut don't exist?" Vinegar demanded. "My head?"

"Naw!" Dr. Gatt twittered. "Yo' pain."

"I ain't said I had no pain," Vinegar informed her. "I specified dat my brains wusn't wuckin' right."

"Don't git funny," Dr. Gatt said, patting him tenderly upon the broad expanse of his bald spot, which extended from ear to ear and from his intellectual forehead to the back of his

neck. Vinegar could comb his head with a wet towel. "You must be real serious and abide in de faith. You is a preacher, and you knows how it is."

"I's shore it will he'p to hab de lady pat yo' head," Pap Curtain snarled. "I's got a little pain on de side of my jaw, an' she's got to pat me nex'."

"I will he'p you git rid of yo' trouble in yo' head," announced Dr. Gatt, ignoring Pap's remark. "Now you recite atter me."

"Do which?" Vinegar asked.

"You repeat whut I say," she said, as she sat down in a chair, keeping one hand upon his head, and holding one of his hands in hers. "Whut you is got to say is very easy."

"Yes'm. It's got to be powerful simple," Vinegar said. "My mind is wabblin'. Whut do I say?"

"Say: 'I am free from pain, I am, I am, I am!'" the woman dictated.

"I am free from pain, I am, yam, dam!" Vinegar declared.

"Say: 'Faith makes me well, well, well!'" Dr. Gatt recited.

"Faith makes me well, yell, hell!" Vinegar orated.

Vinegar opened his eyes and saw her big eyes looking pleadingly into his. He beheld her mouth puckered into a facial gesture which seemed to bespeak soulful things, and saw a spiritual look which had a seriousness like the solemnity of some religious ceremony. He answered with a gripping clutch the grasp of her soft, clinging, catlike paw—a clutch that made her gasp and wince with pain.

"Dis here is gwine along fine!" Vinegar said cordially. "A minute ago I felt like my head wus comin' off. It was kind of loose an' wabbly on de top; but now I feels like makin' a speech along dem same lines, wid dis here candy girl to hold my hand an' he'p me think up de idears. She kin gimme de words, an' I kin bawl 'em. You niggers listen, an' mebbe you kin learn somepin dat will do you a large amount of good!"

"I b'lieve it would he'p a great deal ef all yo' friends would jine in wid you in a chorus," Dr. Gatt suggested.

"Chime in, niggers!" Vinegar commanded. "I'll do de heavy bass. Bear down strong on de chorus!"

"I believes in close harmony," Skeeter Butts laughed, as he drew his chair up beside Dr. Gatt, snuggled up close, and took an affectionate clasp upon her arm with both hands.

"Me, too," Pap Curtain announced, and drew up on the other side, trying to edge in between Vinegar and the woman.

"I will back you-all up," Figger contributed, as he took his place behind the lady's chair and placed both of his black paws on her shoulders. "Dis here is a short 'nuff layin'-on of hands!"

"De Lawd has promised good to me!" Dr. Gatt dictated.

The Tickfall quartet howled a repetition of the words which shook the foundation of the building with its volume of sound. Can you beat it? Here were four men, all of them old enough to know better, indulging in an orgy of childish recitation, lured on by a tall, slender, droopy, soulful woman, whose hands caressed them all with a fluttering ministry of healing. Every one she touched began to feel better. After each caress they felt a distinct improvement. No doubt it was because they were of the first order of intellect, so that her healing process availed mightily for each of them.

"De Lawd has promised good to me. His word my hope secures," Dr. Gatt ordered, and the four men took the prescription with a loud whoop.

"He will my shield an' portion be as long as life endures," the doctor prescribed, and the patients took that, too.

"Through many dangers, toils, an' snares I have already come," Dr. Gatt announced.

There was no answer. The sudden silence was appalling.

All four of the men had caught sight of certain women who had heard the mighty chorus and had paused outside of the door to look and listen; and three of those men recognized their respective wives in the group. Mrs. Atts, Mrs. Curtain, and Mrs. Bush were on their way to the Gaitskill home, to take the place of the discharged servants. How long they had been standing there their husbands did not know, but they felt sure that the lady folks had not missed the intimate details of the tableau.

When the treatment ceased because the four patients refused to take their medicine, the three women came up the steps and entered the office.

"Excuse me, ladies," Dr. Gatt said, realizing the exact status of affairs, and foreseeing what was coming. "Several of my patients requires my services in deir own homes."

She slipped out of the office, as elusive as a shadow, leaving three embarrassed men to hold a family reunion, while Skeeter Butts, happy and fortunate man, an unattached, unmarried, joyous bachelor, thanked the stars for his single blessedness and served as host and master of ceremonies.

"Well, I never!" announced Maw Atts, a big, horse-faced woman with great teeth which snapped together like the jaws of a bear trap.

"I ain't never befo'," Vinegar replied weakly; "but dese here men kep' on encouragin' me, an' aggin' me on, an' aggin' me on!"

"I hope we didn't butt in an' bust up nothin'," said Mrs. Curtain, with such malignity in her tones that her unlucky husband trembled.

This was Pap's fifth matrimonial venture, and with each new wife he had pursued the course of the purchaser of an automobile, demanding the newest make, with the latest improvements and the most up-to-date accessories. The present Mrs. Curtain was noted for her glossy finish, her graceful lines, her quick pick-up and

instantaneous get-away, her speed and power. Moreover, like an automobile, it took money to keep her and money to run her; and if anything was the matter with her, she knocked, back-fired, got overheated, and rattled noisily.

"Dar ain't no tellin' whut you cul-lud ladies have went an' done," Pap sighed, wiping the cold sweat off his face with the sleeve of his coat. "You ain't done nobody no good."

"It wus a kind of layin'-on of hands, warn't it, Figger?" Scootie Bush inquired of her husband in poisonous tones. Scootie was very black. Her head was as round and as hard as a croquet ball, her hand was as big as her head, and her husband knew exactly how hard it was. She doubled her fingers into a fist which resembled the big end of a ham and shook it at Figger's face. "I never seed as many hands spread aroun' in all my bawn days. It wus shore a touchin' scene!"

Figger quacked like a duck two or three times, but no intelligible sounds issued from his trembling lips. Skeeter hastened to the rescue of this victim of the dumb devil.

"It wus de best show I ever rehearsed," he declared, laughing. "Dr. Gatt wus explainin' to us how she done faith healin'."

"I reckon it wucked fine, didn't it?" Maw Atts snapped.

"It wucked fine on Vinegar," Skeeter assured her. "She done cured dat soft spot in his head, an' she wus improvin' his brains an' 'lectrifyin' his mind. Ef we hadn't been interrupted, she would hab growed hair on de place whar de wool oughter grow. It wus mighty nigh a hopeless job, an' we wus all helpin'. Dat woman couldn't never hope to do it all by herself alone."

"Huh!" Maw Atts grunted. "All I got to say is, de nex' time she gibs my husbunt a treatment—ef she ever do agin—I hope you niggers will git out in de woods whar nobody kin see you!"

"We will!" Skeeter said earnestly. "We won't fergit dis here little ex-pe'unce. Us is learned our mistake. An' now my bizness is bein' bad neglected, an' I'll mosey along up to de Henscratch."

"Wait a minute, Skeeter!" Vinegar pleaded. "Us don't want to be left here alone. We'll go wid you!"

So three thoughtful men followed Skeeter Butts down the street. When they arrived at their place of resort, they immediately went into conference pertaining to matters of personal safety. All of them agreed that it would not be wise to go home until the clouds of domestic trouble rolled by.

"I hear tell dat de fish am bitin' fine out to Alligator Lake," Skeeter suggested. "My advice is dat you spend de rest of de day diggin' bait, an' git out to de camp befo' sundown."

"Will you go wid us?" Vinegar asked.

"Naw!" Skeeter replied. "Whut I think is dat one of us oughter kind of stay here an' watch things. I'll let you know when dar ain't no more danger of harm happenin' to you. I might go back to dat doctor an' git me a course of treatments while you-all is gone."

"Ef I wus you, I'd take a full course, Skeeter," Vinegar recommended. "You ain't married, an' you ain't got no green-eyed ol' jealous wife."

"I don't know whether dem women wus mad or jes' takin' on," Skeeter said wonderingly.

"Huh! You don't know nothin' about wives," Pap Curtain replied. "Dey don't never take on an' pretend like. Dey's always got a grouch about somepin. De only hope fer us is to stay away until our wives think we's gone fer good. When dey git skeered, den we'll come back an' make 'em happy."

#### IV

SEVERAL days passed. Beyond the fact that Skeeter missed his friends

and felt rather lonesome, nothing happened. Then Little Bit gave him some information which set him to thinking.

"Dat new female doctor is sure makin' a hit wid her new notions about how to git well," he said. "She didn't do me no good, but all de lady folks is done fell fer her, an' dey's givin' her a party down to de lodge room whar de Sister Stars of de Knights of Darkness meets at."

"Is dey gwine to serve refreshments?" Skeeter asked, with an eye to business.

"Yep—dey done made arrangements wid me to furnish pop, lemonade, an' ice cream."

Dr. Gatt had reached the center of the stage, and the spot light was shining strongly upon her. The leader of the movement to introduce her new methods in the colored social circles of Tickfall was Maw Atts, and the wives of Figger Bush and Pap Curtain were helping. They had managed several social affairs, at which they had assembled a large number of their women friends to hear the woman doctor's "lectures." They tried to make themselves believe that her teaching would be of priceless value if they only had sense enough to understand it and faith enough to believe it.

"Dat's a lot of crazy talk," Little Bit commented. "I done tried it on, an' had it tried on me. 'Tain't nothin'!"

"You'll onderstan' it better when you gits older, Little Bit," replied Skeeter, recalling the scene in the doctor's office after the boy had departed in disgust. "Dem three married men of de Big Fo' liked de treatment fine, but it didn't seem to agree wid deir wives at dat time."

"Ef deir wives didn't git no benefit, how come dey's backin' her up so strong an' givin' her a party?" Little Bit demanded.

"I dunno," Skeeter said. "I ain't went very deep into dat."

The situation caused him a few minutes of deep thought. He knew that



the three jealous wives were not women of a forgiving disposition; and yet they were apparently devoted adherents of the new cult. He decided that Dr. Gatt must have worked some kind of magic upon them. If she could cure actual physical ailments by her faith healing, probably she could find an antidote for the poison of jealousy and dislike, and could establish herself in the affection of her enemies.

Skeeter was curious enough about this to take personal supervision of the serving of refreshments at the party. Little Bit did all the dirty work, while Skeeter, dressed in a white duck suit, directed the operations.

He paid little attention to that part of the affair which consisted of a lecture by Dr. Gatt. She teetered on her toes, she cooed, twitted, and chirruped, she rolled her big eyes and puckered her soulful mouth. She emphatically asserted that there was no pain, no sickness, no sorrow, no death. Belief in such things was evidence of a mind unenlightened, an unregenerate spirit, a soul in darkness.

When the lecture ended, Maw Atts rose and said:

"Ladies, make yo'selfs at home, an' we will soon be served wid refreshments."

Half a dozen young girls came tripping back to the anteroom of the lodge with their trays, and Skeeter was kept busy for fifteen minutes. Then there came the patter of contented conversation, while the women ate the ice cream and nibbled at the cake.

At this point Little Bit thought of certain candy mints which he had concealed under the steps of the lodge building on that recent occasion when he received the stolen goods and found that those he ate disagreed with him. He had never revealed the cause of his fearsome stomach trouble, and he often wondered how those harmless mints could have made him so sick; but he had never had the courage to eat any more of them.

He decided now to try them on the new doctor and her band of converts. He ran out, crawled under the steps, secured the box, and emptied the mints into a dish. Handing the dish to one of the young girls, he told her to pass them.

Now these little disks which resembled candy mints were not what they appeared to be. They were effervescent tablets which Mrs. Gaitskill put into the water in her finger bowls. Effervescing when they were wet, they caused the water to sparkle and bubble like champagne. When Little Bit swallowed a handful, and they came into contact with the moisture of his mouth and stomach, there was an internal explosion which terrified that youth; and now, still ignorant of the inner meaning of the "mints," the boy handed them out to be passed through the crowd.

To Little Bit's satisfaction, the first howl of consternation came from Yawie, the maid who had presented him with the stolen tablets, and who had announced at the time that she despised such confections. Yawie thrust one of them into her mouth, chewed it for a moment, and got each explosive particle around and under and between her teeth. Then, saturated with the moisture of her mouth, as each fragment popped, it felt to her as if a stick of dynamite had exploded between her jaws.

Her mouth flew open, her tongue protruded, and foam bubbled from her lips like the slaver of a mad dog. She uttered a shriek and began to paw at her open jaws with her fingers, while from a dozen other women there came howls of fright. Maw Atts rushed to the middle of the room, both hands pressed upon her middle, and bawled:

"My good Lawd hab mussy! I'm poisoned!"

Skeeter Butts glanced anxiously through the door, just as the wives of Pap Curtain and Figger Bush, both reeling like drunken men, both foam-

ing at the mouth like a fountain of \* soapsuds, began to scream:

"Oh, Dr. Gatt, you ain't et any of dem candy mints, is you?"

Thereupon Skeeter Butts sat down with his mind at ease. His reputation was safe, for he had supplied no mints for the feast. He began, as he expressed it, to "smell a mice."

"Dey aims to 'nitiatie Dr. Gatt right now," he muttered. "Dey craves to make her ride de goat!"

Dr. Gatt, tall, willowy, droopy, teetering on her toes and waving like a stalk of sugar corn, was undergoing a terrific experience. It is difficult to be soulful while one's whole interior mechanism is boiling and effervescing and erupting like Old Faithful, the geyser in Yellowstone Park.

Suddenly Figger Bush's wife rushed toward Dr. Gatt, screaming. Apparently she wanted the healer to help her in her sore distress; but she stumbled and fell, and the top of her concrete head hit the exact center of Dr. Gatt's elongated form with the full force and impetus of one hundred and eighty pounds behind it. The healer sank down upon the floor, regardless of the showy finery of her clothes, and began to pant for breath.

"Oh, Lawd!" she sighed. "I et too many mints!"

"De goat has done butted one time," Skeeter snickered.

Maw Atts had not swallowed her mints, and she was free from the symptoms that so terrified the others. She became master of ceremonies.

"I'm fixin' to die!" Dr. Gatt wailed.

"Naw!" Maw Atts whooped. "Dar ain't no such thing as death. De Lawd has promised good to you!"

"Aw, shut up!" Dr. Gatt howled. "Fer Gawd's sake, send fer a real doctor an' git me out of dis place!"

And there she lay, stretched out upon a floor which had not been swept for three years, her dress scouring in the dust and dirt and mopping it up like a sponge, her eyelids fluttering, her

breath panting in her body, and her hand clutching at the place near her belt where the hardest head in Tickfall had hit like a catapult.

"Say yo' motto!" Maw Atts howled. "Repeat yo' golden tex'! De Lawd has promised good to me, His word my hope secures! He will my shield an' portion be as long as life endures!"

"Eve'ybody jine in de chorus!" Little Bit squeaked.

Many of the women who had not partaken of the supposed mints now united their voices like the sound of many waters, as they chanted:

"Through many dangers, toils an' snares,  
I hab dis word to tell—  
'Tis faith has led me on thus far,  
An' faith will make me well!"

By this time the effect of the tablets had begun to pass away, and those who had swallowed them were no longer terrified. They merely felt as if they had swallowed a torchlight procession. The chief sufferer was Dr. Gatt, and her pain was largely due to her recent collision with Scootie Bush's head.

But Dr. Gatt knew when to fade away. She persuaded some of the women to lift her up and brush her off, and asked them to go with her to her office and help her to pack her things.

While this was going on, three married men who had been fishing on Alligator Lake returned home. Each wife received her husband cordially, and acted as if nothing had happened. Not one of them referred to the reason for the absence of the truants; and while the men wondered, they dared not bring the matter up.

Little Bit toted Dr. Gatt's gripsack down to the station. When the train started, he saw the lady lean out of the window, as if taking a last look at the place in which she had been but a passing incident.

But Little Bit knew better.

"Dat ol' gal is still spittin' cotton!" he snickered.

# A Major Operation



A GROUSE ROARED UP,  
BUT VANE DID NOT SHOOT

*A Modern Tragedy—The  
Terrible Punishment That  
Harry Vane Inflicted On  
the Friend Who Had Done  
Him a Grievous Wrong*

By Robert W. Chambers



MORALITY, so dependent upon digestion, is a reaction from some temporary phase of civilization. The world should sail along freely, and never is likely to. Custom issues letters of marque against it. Intolerance, flying the Jolly Roger, is ever assailing it, and the captured crew are sold to the Great Mogul as galley slaves fettered with moral obligations.

Moral obligations are instinctive. They should fetter license, not liberty. Also man must guess what, if any, may be his spiritual obligations. Only himself can impose them.

All other obligations are imaginary. They are morbid when inherent; when

imposed, offensive inhibitions. Any enforcement of these is a tyranny due to temporary folk ways.

Customs, inhibitions, traditions, superstitions, folk ways—developing, vanishing, replacing one another in amazing antitheses—these all embody an immemorial inquisition which has tortured the mind and body of man since time began.

In Asia it is moral and legal to have more than one wife; in Sagamore County, New York, it is immoral and illegal. In the South Seas a perfectly moral and polite gentleman will lend you his wife. Local law and morals say it's all right, and so do friend husband and friend wife.

But nowhere on earth may one gen-

tleman morally and legally steal the affections of another gentleman's legitimate. That's license, not liberty. It isn't done, as the saying is. If it is done, a major operation is certain to follow, God or man officiating; and the result is another problem.

## II

"How long will Constance be away?" inquired Steyr.

"I don't know," replied Vane, Constance's husband.

"Where did she go?"

"West."

"Oh, out to her sister's? That's funny. I didn't know she was leaving the Toadstool."

"She went suddenly," said Vane, rubbing the barrels and locks of his gun with an oiled rag. He lifted the barrels, looked through them, noticed a slight stain, and swabbed it with a cleaning rod.

Steyr fitted the polished stock of his gun to the barrels, locked them, and snapped on the fore end.

"It's funny," he said. "When I was over here last week, Constance said nothing to me about going away."

"My wife," remarked Vane, "is unaccountable."

He was busy with the cleaning rod when Steyr glanced around at him. Then he looked out of the window.

It was raining hard, and a sagging, leaden sky over the woods offered no hope. The October foliage was not brilliant. A hot summer's drouth had dried it to dull tints. Oaks were an ugly red or muddy brown; maples, a sickly yellow. Everywhere the foliage looked sick and sodden in the falling rain. All through the woods millions of aborted leaves were falling—faded, deformed leaves too early blighted, which spread a sallow carpet over moss and mud.

Steyr, having cleaned his gun, set it against a corner of the chimney and walked to the window.

Rain would clear the trees and

bushes of foliage, anyway, so that they could see to shoot. Already it was fairly clear shooting in the willows and alders. One could at least catch a glimpse of a woodcock or grouse and not feel obliged to fire at the whirl of an unseen bird.

"I don't see any prospect of fine weather," said Steyr, not turning around.

"We'll shoot to-morrow, then," said Vane. "Get your raincoat, Don, and we'll walk in the woods; but perhaps you'd rather read—"

Steyr grunted. It was dull in the Toadstool without Constance. Even an old friend like Harry Vane scarcely mitigated the boredom of an October rain in a Sagamore County bungalow. Years ago they had talked each other out. The only taste they had in common was shooting.

"Books are no good unless you're in the humor," yawned Steyr. "It's dull sprawling by the fire with pipe and whisky. Is the phonograph mended?"

"No."

Only one interesting subject for conversation remained between these two—the perennial discussion of shooting. Even that was dependent upon the day's sport, and there had been none since Donald Steyr's last visit, a week ago.

Steyr came back to the fire, poked the logs, and seated himself in the wing chair reserved for Constance when she was there.

"That was good shooting last week, Harry," he said, with another yawn. "I mean the three days when you were away. I got my limit every day, in spite of the foliage."

"Yes," nodded Vane, "I understand you did."

After a moment Steyr turned his eyes, but not his head, and looked at Vane. The latter sat cross-legged on the floor, assembling his gun, as intent on it as a jeweler dissecting a watch.

"Want to hear about those three days when you were in New York?"



"Yes, I'd like to."

"All right! Let me see—Thursday I got away late; so I took the swales along Dead Brook. They were all natives—there had been no flight. I picked up my quota before I got to the Hell Hole. That was not far, you see; so I came back here and lunched with Constance. She walked out with me about four o'clock. I'd seen a lot of grouse tracks on the silt down by the Hell Hole. I took that new dog, Erl King. He worked too fast, got bogged, and nearly sank out of sight. That scared him, and he worked better. There were a lot of grouse down there. I got the limit before sundown."

"Yes—the limit," repeated Vane tranquilly.

"That was doing pretty well, wasn't it?" demanded Steyr, speaking a trifle louder and more gayly than he intended.

"You usually get what you're after."

"I try," said Steyr, laughing.

"Yes, I know you do."

Slowly the silence filled with the roar of the rain.

"Good thing the roof of the Toadstool doesn't leak," observed Steyr.

"There are leaks."

"Not in the roof?"

"I don't know. You never can tell where a leak will happen in anything."

Steyr's handsome black eyes scarcely flickered toward his friend, who sat polishing the crotch rosewood stock of his gun with a bit of blue silk—a remnant from one of his wife's gowns.

"Leaks," continued Vane carelessly, "are odd things. One never knows when they'll come, or where. First you know there's a drop, then a trickle, then an outrush—like a woman weeping. If you want a high ball, there's Scotch in that cupboard behind you."

"No, thanks," Steyr said; but presently he thought better of it and mixed himself a fairly stiff one.

"Do you want to hear about Friday?" he asked.

"About the shooting?"

"Of course!"

"Certainly."

Steyr briefly sketched out the events of Friday and of Saturday. Vane had set aside his gun and now occupied a leather armchair near the fire. He scarcely seemed to notice what Steyr was saying, or when he finished speaking. He sat absently fingering the fragment of dark blue silk with which he had been carefully polishing his gun stock.

"You'd better have a drink, Harry," said Steyr, after a long silence.

"No."

"You'd better. You don't look very fit."

"I'm all right."

Steyr mixed himself another high ball, remarking that as long as he didn't have to get along without a drink he wouldn't.

"Suppose you had to get along without it?" asked Vane, somberly.

"A damned nuisance!"

"Could you stand it, Don?"

"I'd have to."

"Would it hurt?"

"You bet it would!"

"I guess it hurts you when you lose what you like and are accustomed to?"

"It hurts anybody, doesn't it?" grunted Steyr.

"In some degree," replied Vane.

"Some can't stand the loss of what they want. They just can't go on without it; or, if they do last for awhile, they'd be glad of relief."

"Relief?"

"Yes—death."

"Well, I don't suppose I'd want to die if I had no more whisky."

"Maybe not whisky; but every man feels some need which, if finally frustrated, ends his desire to live. For instance, loss of money after his earning power is gone; or loss of—love."

Steyr half emptied his glass and set it aside with care. He looked at the fire, got up, and mended it.

"Finality in the loss of love," said Vane dreamily, "must be the hardest to endure. There are some who cannot endure it, they say."

Steyr watched the fire.

"Could you endure it?" yawned Vane, and lighted a cigarette.

"Endure what?" inquired the other, after a moment of silence.

"The final loss of—love."

"It would depend," said Steyr.

"On what?"

"Well, on how I lost it. If I tired of a woman, I wouldn't care. If she tired of me, I wouldn't like it. I'd fight for her. I'm stubborn. I wouldn't let her go, even if she wanted to."

"I don't mean that," said Vane. "I mean death. That's finality. What would be your reaction, if she died while she was in love with you, and while you were in love with her?"

"I don't know. I'm safe in saying I'm not in love."

But Vane went on with his theme.

"If she had loved you desperately, and you had loved her in the same way for a long while, how would you get on without her, Don?"

"Rottenly," admitted Steyr, fiddling with his empty pipe.

"Could you manage to forget her?"

Steyr slumped in his chair—*her* chair.

"I don't forget, damn it! That's the trouble with me."

"I call it a virtue, not a trouble," said Vane.

"No, it's a fault—inability to forget. Faults are a painful part of one's character; virtues are acquired—and make trouble endurable," growled Steyr. "They couldn't console me. Indeed, I haven't any, I guess."

He turned and looked at the rain-smear window.

"It's letting up," he observed. "The sky looks better."

He rose and went over to the window.

"So you don't believe you could en-

dure it?" said Vane, looking at the back of the other man's head.

"Endure what?" snapped Steyr.

"Finality—the death of love. It would kill you by degrees; but it wouldn't finish you for a long time, would it?"

"Well, for Heaven's sake!" retorted Steyr, turning squarely toward his friend. "What the devil do you find interesting in all this, Harry?"

"Psychoanalysis—the dissection of the subliminal. But you don't read much, do you?"

"No, nor write much."

Vane nodded.

"No, you prefer being and doing to reading and writing about things. You're quite right."

He got up, went to another window, and looked out at the dripping woods.

"It's still raining," said Steyr. "The scent won't hold; but I hate to be cooped up in the house. When is Constance coming back?"

"She didn't say."

"I didn't know she meant to go away," repeated Steyr, vaguely resentful and perplexed.

"She hadn't intended to. An emergency came up—a matter in which she had no choice. She *had* to go."

"One of those damned family things?"

"Yes—one of those damned things."

"And you don't know how long she'll be away?"

"No, I don't," said Vane.

After a moody interval Steyr went into the hall and put on his cap and raincoat.

"If we can't shoot, let's walk," he said, his voice still sharp with irritation.

Vane got into cap and coat and presently joined Steyr, who was standing on the veranda with a slight scowl on his handsome face. Noticing the gun that Vane carried, he shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not bothering with a gun," he

said. "It bores me to walk up a bird by accident."

Vane gave him a preoccupied glance.

"Accidents are amusing, sometimes," he remarked.

### III

THEY went out through the rain, crossed the cleared acre where a tangle of brown wild grasses and ferns lay matted and drenched, and entered the wood road.

Almost immediately a big grouse roared up from under an oak tree; but Vane did not shoot.

"Caught you napping, Harry!" commented Steyr, grinning.

"No, I'm awake."

"Why didn't you fire?"

"I've only two shells. I might need them—later."

"Probably," grunted Steyr, "you'll see nothing else that you'll want to shoot."

"Oh, I expect to kill something before nightfall," said Vane carelessly.

Over the wood road, dark with sodden forest mold, lay a pale carpet of sickly leaves. Ferns bleached by frost bordered it; tall hardwood trees, their trunks soaked black, towered in the half light. A few clotted, discolored leaves still clung to naked branches. The oaks were still partly clothed with dull red masses of wet and dirty foliage. Skies dripped; trees dripped; frost-blighted swales glimmered with standing water; every gully ran bank full.

Once or twice, distantly, grouse rose from under soaked hemlocks. There was no other movement in the dim woodland waste, and no sound, save for the rain, and an unseen woodpecker drearily hammering away at some dead tree.

On the mud along the stream were strung imprints of wandering grouse. Steyr remarked that the birds must have passed within an hour.

"The black mud by the Hell Hole was full of them last week," he added.

"There were tracks all over the place. It amused Constance. She learned how to distinguish the imprints of grouse, woodcock, crows, and jays. I showed her raccoon tracks, too, and where squirrels and wood mice had crossed. It was amusing."

"In the Hell Hole," said Vane, "there is much to study, much to learn. Did you notice any skunk tracks there?"

"We didn't see any."

"There are too many skunks in these woods. They kill birds."

"Nonsense! A skunk can't catch a grouse."

"Yes—on the nest. You never can tell what a skunk will do," said Vane absently.

They were in swampy woods now. The road wound down through maples from which livid leaves fell constantly to thicken the wet and pallid mat under foot. Steyr pointed out a hawk on a tall, naked basswood, but Vane said:

"That's only a red-shouldered one; he doesn't bother the game."

"I think that will be your last chance to burn your two cartridges, Harry."

"No, I'll have another chance," returned Vane carelessly.

After a few moments they came into sight of the Hell Hole. It was a bog in the woods, set with shallow pools, and not to be crossed on account of quicksand. There was much of this in patches, overlaid with shiny black ooze, and now entirely hidden under fallen leaves.

As they slowly skirted the place, Steyr kept looking for game tracks along the muddy edges. Vane walked over to a fallen pine and seated himself on the wet trunk, from which he could look out over the swamp. Steyr prowled along the border of the mournful place, peering carefully at every patch of mud.

Here the lichen-patched tamaracks had already lost their tarnished

needles. Swamp maples stood naked; a few pines towered high in the thinly falling rain.

Steyr came up presently, and seated himself on the fallen tree.

"The rain has washed out nearly everything," he grumbled. "I made out some grouse tracks, and woodcock have been there. Muskrats have put up some huts in the swale, and a couple of heron went back through the woods—that's all."

Vane remained silent. He sat with his elbows resting on his knees and his head propped between both hands.

After awhile Steyr looked around at him and saw his ghastly face.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, startled.

"Well—what is the matter with me?" returned Vane.

"Your face is all white and sunk in. Are you ill? What's the matter with you, anyway? Is it a chill?"

"No."

"We'd better go back," said Steyr, rising.

Vane did not move, and the other man reseated himself. There followed a long silence, during which, now and then, Steyr glanced sidewise at his friend.

"What are you watching?" he demanded finally.

"There's something out there in the Hell Hole," returned Vane, in a voice almost inaudible.

"A rat, probably."

"No—there's something under the mud."

"Under the mud?"

"Yes—down under the slime and filth. I thought I could see something heaving down there."

"What are you talking about? Rats don't go into that mud. No living thing goes into that slime."

"Maybe it's dead."

"Dead! Dead things don't stir and heave under the mud. What's got into you, anyway? You look as if you

were on the verge of a chill. You'd better—"

"There's something under—under—that mud," said Vane unsteadily. "Something that's stirring in the slime—striving to heave up out of it."

"Where?" Steyr looked at Vane, and followed the direction of his haunted eyes; but after a moment he said: "There isn't a damned thing there!"

"Yes—there is a damned thing there! It's trying to—to free itself. It will struggle up out of the mud after awhile. You watch. You'll see!"

"You talk like a crazy man!"

"I *am* crazy. You didn't know that, did you? You didn't suspect it, did you?"

Steyr stared at him. After a moment Vane turned a corpse-like face on the other man.

"Certainly I'm crazy," he muttered. "You will be crazy, too; but I'll get over it. That's the difference—I'll get over it in a few moments, now, but you'll get crazier every minute, every day, every year. You'll *never* get over it—not while you're alive; and you'll be alive a long, long time!"

Vane began to laugh in a soundless way. He took his haggard face between his hands again and stared out at the mud.

"You watch," he muttered, "and you'll see what comes up out of the Hell Hole! You'll see *who* comes up out of that mud!"

Suddenly the blank horror on Steyr's face changed to an awful look. Vane began to mumble again.

"You'll never get over it," he said. "You'll go crazy with it. It'll kill you, after a long, long while—the loneliness—the want of her—the want of *her*!"

He got up, gun in hand, muttering and mumbling to himself, and went puttering about among the naked bushes—fussing and puttering like a bent old man gleaning rotten fagots.

Steyr had no strength to rise; and



if he was striving to speak his stiffened, distorted lips scarcely twitched. Only his starting eyes stared and strained through the gathering dusk, following Vane where he went about among the bushes like some humpy animal all bent over, muttering and searching among dead ferns and fallen leaves.

After awhile Vane stood up among the low bushes and cocked his gun. Then he pointed toward the Hell Hole with a long crotched stick, and called out to Steyr:

"What you want is in there—down there in the mud somewhere, trying to

struggle up to tell you who put her there—"

Steyr screamed. He reeled to his feet, and stood swaying in the rain, his face agonized.

"Skunk tracks along the Hell Hole!" shouted Vane with a crazy laugh. "I saw them!" He held out the forked stick. "This is all I need to cure *me*," he said; "but you'll go living, year after year, without her!"

"Oh, my God!" shrieked Steyr; but Vane had rested his chin on the muzzle of the cocked gun and was poking at the triggers with his forked stick.

---

#### SWEET PREVARICATION

If you should say to me, "My dear,  
The moon is made of cheese,  
And money blossoms in the spring  
And ripens on the trees,"  
I would not scoff in unbelief,  
With words ribald and hoarse;  
I'd leave my hand still clasped in yours,  
And answer "Yes, of course!"

I know the things you say to me  
Are only pretty lies,  
But when you lie about my hair,  
And praise my lips and eyes,  
Repeating for the hundredth time  
The lies you've told before—  
I know you love me, so I long  
To hear you lie some more!

I know you probably have lied  
To other girls than me,  
About their lips, their eyes and hair  
And other charms; you see  
I do not kid myself. I know  
That lying is a vice,  
But when you tell those lovely lies  
To me—I think it's nice!

So, keep on lying to me, dear;  
I love to hear your lies  
About my lips, and cheeks, and hair,  
My dimples and my eyes;  
I know that none of it is true,  
And that some other dame  
Heard it before you knew me, but—  
I love it just the same!

*Will Thomas Withrow*



IT WAS  
UNREAL, IN-  
EXPLICABLE

## The Invisible Girl

*A Mystery of the Latin Quarter—The Uncanny Experience That Befell Lester Bradley, the American Novelist, in an Ancient House on the Rue Bréa*

By Gelett Burgess

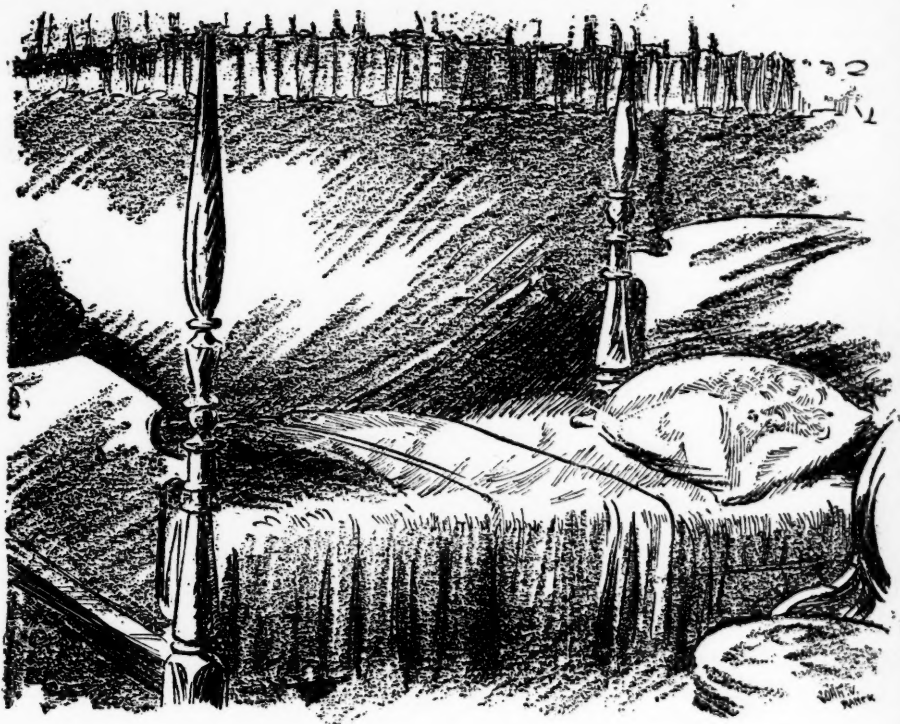


IT'S usually a pretty expensive pastime, sowing wild oats, especially if you put it off till you're forty; but Bradley made a quarter of a million dollars out of his little crop. His sowing was peculiar. His reaping was peculiar, too; but what was most peculiar of all, perhaps, was Lester Bradley himself.

Even to me—and I suppose I knew him as intimately as anybody—Bradley never told the whole story; but it hap-

pens to be one of those intimate mysteries that are much more interesting if you fill in the blanks yourself.

If you're not familiar with ancient houses in Paris, you might have thought Bradley's rooms in the Rue Bréa a bit dismal, even sinister. The heavy, antique furniture was crowded in there like tombstones in a French cemetery. When you walked in across the slippery parquet floor, hollowed with age, you felt like yanking down the heavy, dusty, funereal draperies



that muffled all street sounds.

Bridley's old place was stuffy, but it certainly was romantic. You might even wonder if something rather awful hadn't at some time happened in those dim, low-ceiled chambers; but once you caught sight of Bridley, with his hair neatly parted in the middle, and his neatly clipped mustache, you would be brought right back to the commonplace. No one could be more respectable, more unexciting.

Bridley, in fact, was a bit of a prig. He had once been an English instructor in some fresh-water college, you see, and he had never quite outgrown the pedagogical manner. I always felt as if some hidden cord were tied under his arms, inhibiting any natural abandon. He told me once that he had been brought up by two maiden aunts; and indeed, as he pattered about with a coffeepot in the twilight of his sitting room, after dinner, he seemed not

unlike a virtuous old maid in blue serge trousers.

## II

BRIDLEY was restless that June evening. He had been, for him, rarely agitated ever since Mr. Hamelot had written. Every little while he stole to the window and looked anxiously out.

Toward nine o'clock he saw the big, shiny beetle shell of a limousine stop at his door. Hurriedly he pat-patted a sofa cushion and rearranged a careful composition of books and magazines on a tabouret. Then he lighted a gold-tipped cigarette in a long white holder and waited, pretending to himself and his black cat, Friquette, to be quite indifferent to the honor he was about to receive.

David J. Hamelot, he had heard, was never wholly sober. Indeed, the man must have been pretty drunk, Bridley had always thought, when he

accepted some of the books he published. Still, that didn't prevent the imprint of the Hamelot Press appearing on most of the best-sellers nowadays.

It was after an almost terrifying knock, knock, knock, that an easy, loose-jointed giant in gray tweeds rambled in. His curly gray head almost touched the ceiling.

"Hello, boy!" How Bridley hated people who slapped him on the back! "Queer old joint you've got here. Has a history, I'll bet!" Hamelot smiled a loose, amiable smile, and looked about. "Got anything to drink? Oh, coffee—hell! Don't you keep any liquor in the house?"

Then he dropped into a big chair, and his legs seemed to sprawl all over the room.

Though whisky is almost as expensive in Paris as in New York, and Bridley wasn't notoriously lavish, he had a bottle ready. Hamelot emptied his glass, with his eyes fixed on a framed photograph on the table.

"Pretty, ain't she? That your best girl? Pretty young, though."

It was his niece, Nelly Faxon, Mr. Bridley said. He thought the world of her, and was helping to educate her.

"Need a lot o' money for that, boy—lot o' money! Well, maybe I can show you how to make it. Now, see here, boy, I looked you up for a reason. How many books you written, eh?"

Bridley confessed to four novels. They had sold only a few thousand copies each, but he added modestly that they had received really awfully good criticisms.

"Oh, critics—hell! Gimme 'nother drink, boy. That's 'nough—thanks! Get any straight reading matter in the papers about your stuff? Any editorials? Any preachers ever denounce you in sermons? Boosted by any important names? Know any damn thing at all about logrolling? I thought not! Come now, I bet you don't make five

thousand a year, boy, now do you? Why, see here"—how Bridley hated to be tapped on the knee!—"I've read some of your stuff. Lived in Ioway myself. Says I to myself, 'There's a boy that can write!' Am I right or wrong? Old-fashioned, though—dull. See here, boy, why don't you write something to make folks talk?"

Bridley, in his bland, varnished manner, explained that he had to write what came to him, and he did his best with it.

"Phoof!" Hamelot waved aside such puerility with a huge and shaky hand. "No wonder you ain't been heard of." He was watching Bridley's cat. "You wake up to this modern tempo, boy, and I bet you could deliver the goods. This is the age of jazz, boy—am I right or wrong?"

Bridley was trying his well bred best to smile, but the idea of any mere commercial publisher instructing him in his art irritated his sensitive Harvard nature.

"Don't scowl, boy! Why should spirit mortal be proud?" Hamelot was unsteadily pouring another libation. "Trouble with you, boy, you've gone sound asleep here in Paris. Need little jab of New York spuzz. Bet I could make a writer of you, though, at that! Say, what's matter that cat? I hate cats. Dogs for me, every time. Well, here's to quick sales and big royalties!"

He coughed a sputtering cough. Then, wiping off his lips with a rich and garish yellow silk handkerchief, he went on:

"Say, I s'pose you read 'The Turbulent Generation'? See here!" Hamelot shook his finger. "Why, when this Jefferson chap brought it into my office—"

"Jefferson?" Bridley exclaimed. "Not Carl Jefferson? Why, did he write that book?"

"He wrote it," sang the publisher, "but I made it. Dullest manuscript I ever read! Why, after I'd looked it



over, know what I did? I sent for Jeff, and says I, 'Jeff, see here. I'm going to take this paper knife, here, and I'm going to cut this manuscript three times, just like a pack of cards, see? One, two, three! Now,' says I, 'you go home, boy, and write me three good lively, red-hot scenes, and insert 'em into this bunch o' junk, and I'll publish your book anonymously.' What's result?" Hamelot was flourishing a whisky bottle. "Sold over six hundred thousand copies, and Jeff—know what he made, movie rights 'n' everything? Nice lil half million!"

"Why," said Bridley, "wasn't that the book suppressed in Boston?"

"Best piece of advertising I ever pulled off!" Hamelot's eyes were still on the cat. "Nothing indecent, though, in whole book. Why, look at 'Ladies Love Pearls'! Look at 'How Dora Did It'! Can you find one word to cause blush o' shame and so forth? All there, though! Suggestion—thin ice—tickle 'em—that's what pays! Old maids love it, flappers scream for it, preachers simply couldn't earn their salaries without it." He was pounding the table. "Sex, boy, sex! Biggest thing in world—am I right or wrong?" He stopped abruptly, "Say—what's matter that cat?"

Friquette was flattened on the floor, watching the door, her tail slowly twitching; but Bridley was thinking only of Jefferson's half million dollars.

Hamelot pulled himself up rather unsteadily.

"What's she looking at, that damn cat? Mouse?" He stretched his long arms. "Well, see here now, tell you what I'm goin' do. I'll send you up a lot of our new books—hot ones. You look 'em over, and then you go to work, boy, and write your head off!"

Bridley had picked up a thick manuscript from the table.

"Why, I was going to tell you, Mr. Hamelot," he said, "that I've just finished a novel, and I was thinking of—"

"Listen, boy! Fore you lemme see

that stuff, you just think over what I said, and you decide, boy, whether you want to be a stick-in-the-mud here, or wake up and make some real money!"

Long after Hamelot had rambled out, stumbled out, Bridley did think it over, sitting at his window, as the afterglow faded from the sky.

So that was how old Jeff had made his money, was it? Jeff, who had hacked along for the last fifteen years, unheard of! Jeff, who knew nothing at all of the technique of construction, who couldn't possibly write a line of distinguished English! How often Bridley had run into him, in the old days—the days of griddle cakes at Childs's!

"Honest, Brid, old man, I'll pay it back sure, next Saturday!" Jeff had said many times.

And now, by a clumsy trick of the rankest sensationalism, Jeff a demi-millionaire! Jeff staying at the Ritz now, when he came to Paris. His own car—touring to Deauville, gambling at Nice; and he, Lester Bridley, accepting Jeff's ostentatious dinners! Even Jeff's bediamonded wife would patronize him, as if Jeff had suddenly become a heaven-born genius, and he, Lester Bridley—

Why try to be sincere in one's work, and slave for a literary ideal, when Jeff could dash off a best-seller like that? Oh, God, how *he* could use money!

Such were the thoughts of Lester Bridley, alone in that old-time, sinister room, abstractedly turning the pages of his manuscript in the dusk.

### III

THE brightly lighted *terrasse* outside the Café du Dôme was crowded that warm June evening. Chairs and tables were spilled all over the sidewalk of the Boulevard Montparnasse, almost to the curb, and the air was full of gabble and laughter. Toward ten o'clock I noticed a neatly dressed youngish man in a derby hat, peering

into the crowd, evidently looking for a vacant table.

I had often seen Bridley there at the Dôme. Among the freak artists, the literary clowns, and the cynical newspaper men, he would sit and look on in his quiet, academic way, and was equally considered by all. People bowed to him, yes, and even spoke, sometimes; but they usually passed on to more liberal and stimulating company. However, I almost liked Bridley; and as I was alone that evening, I called him over.

At the few social gatherings in the Quartier Latin where I had met him, Bridley, I had found, was usually abstemious; but to-night he ordered a brandy and soda.

"The fact is I'm a bit upset," he said. "It may sound silly, but to tell the truth I'm rather nervous about going back to my rooms to-night."

He looked about to make sure no one was listening. Then he moved his chair nearer mine.

"I was sitting at my window, you see—only about half an hour ago, it was. I had been looking over the manuscript of the novel that I've just finished, and I was sitting there, thinking, you know, just thinking, when I thought I heard my door open softly and then close. I looked around, but there was nobody there. It was getting rather dark in the room, you know, and I could see my cat's eyes gleaming with an opalescent greenness. I don't know why I felt so uneasy, but I got up, laid my manuscript on a chair, went to the door, and looked out. No one on the landing—no one on the stairs! I noticed, though, that the *concierge's* dog, downstairs, was whimpering. Well, I came back, lighted up, and looked about. Nothing at all unusual there. I went into my bedroom, and I even looked under the bed."

I couldn't help smiling. Bridley looked a little hurt; but he was confident, too.

"It wasn't till then that I noticed

Friquette. She was standing still, her tail twitching and her head turning slowly, as if she was watching something moving. I stood there for some time, looking where the cat looked, but seeing nothing that could have attracted her attention. Then, all at once, something white moved. It was only my manuscript, which had slipped off the velvet cushion of a chair, but I give you my word it was just as if some one had pushed it off. I kept looking around the room, looking everywhere. There was nobody, of course, in sight; but I felt abnormally sentient, somehow—prescient. I felt something alien in the atmosphere."

Bridley folded his arms almost defiantly.

"I was perfectly sure then, and I'm perfectly sure now," he said, "that there was some one or something alive in that room. I felt decidedly queer."

I looked at him rather coldly. It certainly does seem that Americans in Paris are all more or less mad. You never know what inconsequent things they'll do or say next; and now, by Jove, it was Lester Bridley, the sanest and most civilized man I knew.

"Well, what d'you think it was?" I asked impatiently. "A burglar, or a ghost, or what?"

"It couldn't be a burglar, for there was no room for him to hide; and I believe in ghosts just about as much as I do in Santa Claus."

"Well, why were you afraid, then?"

Bridley thought it over as he sipped his brandy and soda.

"It wasn't fear, exactly," he told me. "It was more like—well, something antagonistic. It was a sort of repulsion."

It was just imagination, I thought; but I really had to go then, and so I merely told him that he'd better sleep it off.

#### IV

BUT he didn't sleep it off—at least, not in his own bed. I found out after-

ward that Bridley went to a hotel that night. He went there the next night, too, and the next. In fact, he slept at the hotel for a week. Every morning he went over to his rooms in the Rue Bréa, and conscientiously tried to work; but all the time, he said, he had a strong impression that some one was there.

Bridley had a dogged streak in him. He must have sat there alone, I imagine, watching for hours, every day, like a sentinel on the *qui vive*.

He told me about it a week later. The first tangible evidence of a presence, he said, was seeing the long, heavy tapestry window draperies sway, one afternoon, as if some one had come out from behind them. Dust flew, he said, and swirled in the sunshine, and several times he felt a distinct current of air—warm air—sweep past him. Once he saw the bedroom door open and shut of itself. These things always happened in the afternoon.

And then, one day, the cat began to act just as she often did when she rubbed up against his legs. She was weaving back and forth, turning and purring, all alone in the middle of the room.

"I was sitting at my desk," said Bridley, "writing, or trying to, when I noticed it. She was rubbing up, by Jove, against nothing at all—nothing visible, that is, but rubbing against *something*, as sure as death! You needn't smile, but Friquette's been doing it ever since. The thing—creature—whatever it is, seems to have a definite physical body, and that cat can see it. Watching it all the time, Friquette is!"

Of course I offered to go over to his place and stay with him for awhile, to see what I thought. I began to think Bridley was in a bad state of nerves; but no, he wanted to stick it out alone. If it was a hallucination, he said, he wanted to conquer it himself. He made me promise not to tell anybody about the affair. Bridley had always

hated anything queer or irregular.

Lester Bridley, you see, had come to me, some months before, with a letter of introduction from New York. He was a bit pathetic, with his too polite, self-conscious ways. If only he hadn't tried so hard to be a good fellow! Elaborate puns, you know, and all that.

Girls called Bridley a stick—a rather nice stick, though, and polished. He was one of those men, you know, who change completely when a woman appears, and begin to grin. Like most men who have never had much experience with women, in a *tête-à-tête*, I imagine, Bridley was apt to be rather silly.

But I must admit that my opinion of Bridley now went up considerably. Phantasm, fancy, or whatever it was, it was pretty sporting of him, I thought, to go back to that old room, day after day—to feel an invisible presence there all the time—to try to get used to it, and to work.

As the days went by, I wondered more and more just what was happening. Every time I passed down the Rue Bréa I looked up at Bridley's window; but he was never to be seen. Finally I began to worry about him a little. Perhaps he might be in need of help.

Now the *concierge* of every Paris house, as you know, is a sort of amateur spy. Through the glass door of her huddled little room on the ground floor she can, and she usually does, see every person who enters or leaves the house; but Bridley's *concierge*, when I entered the little court, was busy cuffing and scolding her dog. He was howling dismally. She told me that M. Breedlee was quite annoyed by it.

Her mother, an ancient, wrinkled, crazy crone, bundled up in a black shawl, was peering out of the glazed door of the *loge*, her eyes on the whimpering dog.

"I know what he's afraid of," she crooned. "I know! I know!"

As Bridley, I was told, had gone up-

stairs—alone—only half an hour ago, I went up the one flight of bare, polished oaken stairs, and knocked at his door. There was no answer. I knocked again. I thought it rather queer.

When I went out, the old hag in the *loge* eyed me closely. I thought that the ironic smile on her withered lip was rather queer, too.

A few days after that Bridley called on me. He seemed younger, somehow—more dapper, anyway.

"Oh, yes," he said, "the supernatural demonstrations are still going on." I noticed, however, that he didn't appear unduly worried about them. "Why, the day I came back to stay, you know, I thought I noticed a faint odor in the room. I thought at first that I might somehow have brought it in myself; but it grew stronger every day."

"What kind of an odor?"

"Oh, a perfume—I don't know what it was—some perfume."

I was watching Bridley closely. At first I didn't understand the expression that had come on his face. It was a silly, conceited look.

"It's a woman," said Bridley.

I lighted my pipe rather slowly, and tipped back in my chair.

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, I touched her." He had a genuine simper now. "She ran into me—or perhaps I ran into her."

"Or perhaps it was mutual," I couldn't help saying.

Bridley stiffened.

"Oh, well, if you don't believe it," he said.

I saw that if I was ever to get anything more out of him, I would have to accept everything he said without question; so he explained that apparently his visitor wasn't yet wholly materialized. Had I ever, when swimming in the sea, touched a big jellyfish, he asked me, and never seen it? Well, she was like that, he said—soft and yielding.

"But later I really got hold of her,"

he told me. "You see, I saw a chair move slightly, and the curtains swayed, and I knew she was in a corner of the room; so I ran over there and spread out my arms wide."

"Did she struggle much?"

You should have seen Bridley's smirk!

"A little," he said; "that is, at first."

At first! I'm telling you, you understand, just what Bridley told me. Bridley was in dead earnest—there's no doubt about that. *He* believed it. No man ever lied with that sweet, soft, asinine look on his face.

"It was rather embarrassing, really, you know, after I'd found out that it was a woman," he said. "Why, at first I hardly dared to go to bed at all. I didn't know what the devil to do."

"Couldn't you have locked yourself into the bedroom?"

"But I could never be sure that she wasn't in there already," he said. "I didn't know *where* she was. Why, in point of fact, one night I thought sure I was alone, and I had begun to undress; and then, all of a sudden, I saw the imprint of a head come on the pillow."

"On the pillow?"

"Yes; and then a long depression in the bed itself, as if some one had just lain down." He looked at me with a troubled look in his blue eyes. "Why, darned if I didn't have to sit up all night in my living room!" he said.

I didn't offer, after that, to accompany Bridley to his rooms, and you may be sure I didn't again knock at his door; but my curiosity was so acutely aroused that one day I did write a note to him, asking him to come and have dinner with me. I myself took it over to his *concierge*.

The dog was still whimpering. He whimpered every afternoon, the *concierge* told me. Her old mother watched me, nodding her head portentously.



"I know, I know!" she muttered.

As I stood there talking, a young girl—a lovely young thing, she was—came into the court. In very pretty French she inquired whether Mr. Bridley was in.

I raised my hat.

"Pardon me, but aren't you Miss Faxon?" I asked her.

Bridley had mentioned his niece Nelly to me several times, and had shown me her portrait. She was a fresh, blue-eyed beauty, perhaps sixteen, very smartly dressed, and extraordinarily innocent and sweet, I thought, for these modern days. She went upstairs. I was rather curious to see what would happen, and I waited.

In a few moments she came down.

"I don't see why he wouldn't let me in," she said. "This is the third time I've come all the way over from the Étoile, and he won't even answer. Oh, dear, he might have opened his door for a *minute*, anyway—just a minute!"

"Oh, I suppose he's absorbed," I said. "Probably he doesn't want to break the spell, you know."

I walked up toward the boulevard with her, looking for a taxi, and she asked me how I liked her Uncle Lester's novels.

"Oh, yes, I like them, of course," she confessed, after my polite evasion; "but—oh, I think I prefer stories—you know, real love stories—more exciting, you know!"

## V

NEXT day, when I met Bridley, he was much disturbed at hearing of her visit.

"Why, I wouldn't have hurt Nelly's feelings for anything," he said; "but what could I do? Even if I had known that it was she who knocked at my door, why, I couldn't have let her in, could I?"

"You mean," I asked, "that the—the lady—the invisible girl—would have manifested herself to Miss Faxon?"

"I don't know—that's just it. If anything strange *had* happened, though, I would have had hard work explaining it to a young girl. Of course, Nelly mightn't have noticed anything out of the way, but I'd have been so darned uncomfortable myself that she'd probably have noticed something queer about *me*, anyway. I'd have felt so—so—"

"So guilty?" I suggested.

Bridley gave me a look.

"So embarrassed, so—er—awkward, you know."

All this was upstairs at the old Restaurant Alençon. Bridley had called for me; and, though I had never seen him smoking anything but the most ladylike gold-tipped Turkish cigarettes, he had come in with a cigar in his mouth. His hat—Bridley was one of the few who still clung to the derby—wasn't it ever so slightly tilted on one side? Imagine Bridley being devilish!

"You know, really, it's extraordinary," he said. "It isn't a thing that arrives to every one, you know, is it?"

I said that I doubted if it had ever happened before.

"I can't believe it myself, quite," said Bridley; "but she comes in toward one o'clock every day, now. I see the door open and shut, and then I know she's in there with me."

"No way of keeping her out, I suppose?"

Bridley looked at me.

"Why, no! Why should I?" And then, after he had poured another glass of Burgundy: "You know, I believe she's beautiful. Why, she *must* be! After we got a little better acquainted, you know, I found that she had curly hair—not very long, though. I have an idea that she's a golden blonde."

I tried not to appear too interested as I asked:

"What does she wear—modern clothes?"

Bridley was a little evasive. Something—he hesitated—something thin

and flowing, he thought. It was evidently only partly materialized, for his hand went right through it.

"It must rather interfere with your work," I remarked, "having her there all the time."

Bridley's expression became more wholesome.

"Why, that's the queer part of it—I *am* working. In fact, I'm writing my head off these days."

"What? You mean to say that you can write, with a thing like that floating about in your room?"

"Oh, she doesn't float, you know. She can walk, all right enough. Her specific gravity's almost normal, now. It's only her index of refraction that's zero, I suppose. She's transparent, you see; but I can tell pretty well when she's near me, and I know she wants me to write. Why, she encourages me, all the time."

I looked puzzled.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of it," he went on. "One afternoon I was in my bedroom, taking a nap, for I was tired; and suddenly I heard my typewriter going in my sitting room. I jumped up and looked in there. It had stopped; but I had left a sheet of paper in the roller, and when I went over to look at it, by Jove, there was something typed on it. It was in French, of course—only a few lines."

As Bradley's French wasn't any too strong, I offered to help translate it; but he said he had made it out fairly well, and it was rather amusing. He went on to tell me that he was rewriting the novel he had just finished. He had read it over, he said, and he had found it dull and old-fashioned. He was going to jazz it up considerably and make it more romantic. "The modern tempo," he called it.

"I've done one corking new scene already," he said. "Pretty lively stuff, if I do say it. I was delighted with it. Why, I got the idea, you know, one evening—"

Then he stopped. Smiling, he struck

a match as recklessly as any college boy. I, too, struck a match, but more cautiously. "After she had been there with you?" I ventured.

"Why, of course! And, d'you know, I think it's a distinguished piece of connotation. Suggestion, you know—thin ice. Oh, the public's changed nowadays! You have to tickle 'em sometimes."

It was getting late, and Bradley seemed to be in a hurry to get back to his rooms. As we walked up the Boulevard Montparnasse, I said:

"Well, after all, I don't know that I'd care to go up into your place, and open the door, and know that there was an invisible spooky something in there in the dark, waiting for me—touching me, perhaps."

Bridley's smile was superb.

"Oh, but she's *nice*, you know!" As we passed the Café Select, he added: "She's charming!" We passed the Café de la Rotonde. "You've no idea how—how fascinating she is, really!"

It was after Bradley had bade me a rather hurried, abstracted good night that, having lingered awhile with his *concierge*, I asked:

"It's a pretty old house here, isn't it, *madame*? Do you know anything of its history?"

She laughed, and nudged her eerie old mother. "*Monsieur* wishes to know about this house," she said. "I say, he wants to know about this house!"

The withered crone came to life.

"Tell him! Tell him!" she screeched.

A pretty gay place it had been, that old house—rather too gay, the *concierge* told me, while her old mother nodded and nodded. There had been wild times there. What they called the first floor—one flight up, that is—had been occupied by a very lively and notorious lady named Mlle. Rose Larose. A splendid blonde she was, from Tours, and she had lived with her

maid, a negress, who was as bad as Rose, if not worse. Men came from all over Paris—even the Spanish ambassador came to her famous parties.

What finally became of the two women, the *concierge* didn't know. Of course, it was all long before she was born. Oh, yes, probably Mlle. Rose was dead long ago.

And the ancient crone nodded her gray, beshawled head: "Dead! Dead! But I know! I know!"

I leaned down and spoke to her.

"Did you ever see her, *madame*, this Mlle. Rose?"

She nodded a dozen times before she answered.

"Ah, I can see her now, *monsieur*, coming out with her negro maid, in her wide hoops and her green mantle, and with the diamonds sparkling under her curls. Ah, she was golden, like sunlight! And you should have seen the carriages, *monsieur*, all lined outside her door of an evening, and the coachmen laughing together, and the singing and laughing upstairs till two in the morning! Mlle. Rose never got up till noon. Every Sunday morning she went to mass, and God knows, *monsieur*, she must have had plenty to say at confession. Every one on the street liked her, just the same; and dull enough it was in the *quartier*, too, when she left!"

The younger woman's hand was on my arm. She implored me not to tell M. Breedlee anything. He'd be terribly shocked, poor dear man—he was so proper!

But as I went away the old hag was still cackling:

"I know! I know!"

I saw Bridley only once, after that, before I left Paris. He was coming up the Boulevard Raspail, with a malacca stick, looking so jaunty that I hardly knew him. Why, he was as free and devil-may-care as any actor on the stage. He had a yellow necktie and a pointed, waxed mustache; and,

if you will believe me, he was wearing white spats.

He didn't seem to want to stop and talk. He was hurrying home, he said. He was still working hard on his novel, which was almost finished now, and he was enjoying it immensely. He lit a cigarette.

"Oh, *rather!*" he replied to my question. "Yes, she comes in—she comes in every afternoon."

I asked if she was becoming any more visible.

"Not much," he said wistfully. "It's so exasperating, too, when I know that she's so—so—oh, she must be so beautiful!"

## VI

WHEN I returned from New York, in May, it seemed to me that half the passengers on the boat—all the old maids and schoolma'ams, anyway—stretched out on their deck chairs, had their noses buried in a certain book with a black cover and flashy gold label.

"The Primal Urge" had pages of stodgy, laborious prose that I simply had to skip; but in other spots it was so diabolically clever that I confess I couldn't put the book down.

The Vice Society—trust Hamelot for that!—had already made "The Primal Urge" a household phrase. Clergymen had so alluringly denounced it that flappers had bought it, and were still buying it, by the thousands. The novel was anonymous. I had heard no end of gossip and speculation as to its authorship; but a writer might live a year in New York without hearing as much inside literary gossip as in a week in Paris at the Café du Dôme.

"Well, if you don't believe he wrote it," said a bibulous newspaper know-it-all, at my table, one day, on the *terrasse*, "where the devil did he get all his money so suddenly?" At that moment an enormous Hispano-Suiza torpedo was stopping in front of the Dôme. "Why, *there!*" the speaker

spluttered. "Look! Look at him there, now!"

Before Lester Bradley, in an English sport suit, had touched foot to the curb, two of the Dôme's toadiest glad-handers had welcomed him with a signal and significant effusion.

"Hello, Brid!" cried other voices. "Come over here, Bradley!" "How are you, old man?"

As soon as Lester Bradley had tipped back in his wicker chair, popular authors—notorious snobs, by Jove—were making their way over to his table. I didn't join the merry group, where porto flips were being ordered and re-ordered by Bradley. I was too much amused in watching his metamorphosis into a notable and courted figure.

It may have been because I was perhaps the only one there who had ever really fraternized with him in his leaner days that Bradley, when he spied me, did me the honor to come over and shake hands; but wasn't it, I wondered, rather because I was the only one in possession of his secret?

As he drove me across Paris, over the Pont Royal, weaving in and out of the traffic, with policemen brandishing white batons at him, all the way to the Ritz, we talked in snatches. Oh, yes, he was still writing, he told me. Didn't really have to, now, but—well, he liked writing.

He actually pretended to me—money certainly does give one confidence—that he had never finished the novel he had been rewriting when I left Paris. At the Ritz bar—the girls all eying him—he explained easily that he had got interested in a new idea. He was doing another novel now.

"But I never care to talk about my work, you know," he ended airily.

Bradley, who had never talked of anything else, in the old days! Then, over a champagne cocktail, he asked me about New York literary affairs.

I didn't quite have the nerve to ask him point-blank if he had written "The Primal Urge." An author, of course,

has a right to protect his anonymity; and Bradley, in those Dover Street togs, would probably have lied very gracefully, anyway. I merely asked him if he had read it.

Yes, he liked it, he said.

"Not exactly for the young girl, though," I laughed.

"It wasn't written for the young girl! Why the devil shouldn't one be frank and sincere about sex?" he demanded. "The author's business is telling the truth, not perpetuating the shams of a conventional morality."

He didn't see what all the bally damning of the book was for, anyway, he added. Could this be my gentle Lester Bradley, talking so boldly of tribal tabus and fetishes and all that sort of thing—banging his fist on a Ritz table? He had certainly become more masculine, and I was convinced that he had recently experienced some unusually poignant contact with life.

"I hear you have a big studio apartment in the Rue Schoelcher now," said I; "so I suppose you've given up those queer old rooms you had in the Rue Bréa?"

"Oh, no, I still keep them—to work in, you know."

I didn't intend, this time, to let him off.

"And the er—the invisible lady"—I was watching him closely—"has *she* given them up?"

Bradley, as the French say, laughed yellow.

"I was a damned fool ever to tell you anything about that affair!"

"Affair? Then she's still there? She still comes?"

"Rather—every afternoon. I can't seem to work without her now. She's a tremendous inspiration, you know, really."

"Has she materialized, then?"

"Perhaps it's more that I've got used to her."

"Just what do you mean? You can see her now?"

"Almost—that is, just enough to



tell where she is, sometimes, in the room."

"Sometimes? When, for instance?"

"Oh, when I don't eat," said Bradley.

I had to laugh. It was a fact, though, Bradley asserted solemnly, that the longer he went without food and drink, and especially when he was exhausted, the clearer and more tangible his visitant became.

"Why not?" he demanded. "It's a well enough known theory of mysticism, isn't it? Vigils and fasting and mortification of the flesh—isn't that the way the old seers achieved the visionary state?"

But somehow it amused me to have Bradley put his affair with the mysterious lady on this spiritual basis, there in the Ritz bar.

"You're still quite sure she has a real, physical body?" I ventured. "You can touch her, you said?"

"Why, except for my not being able to see her, she's not much unlike any other woman now. Of course, I can't actually hear what she says, either."

"You communicate with her in some esoteric way, you mean?"

"Yes—not always in words. I can't explain it, but I can understand her perfectly now; and sometimes I can hear her laugh, too."

It was quite as if he were telling me about some eighteen-dollar-a-week stenographer; but I couldn't refrain from expressing my bewilderment. I wondered just how it would seem.

"Why, it's not much different from being blind," he said. "D'you suppose blind men never know women? Good Heavens, man!" Bradley was pulling on his white buckskin gloves. "Didn't you ever shut your eyes while you were kissing a girl?"

## VII

I WAS SORRY that I couldn't accept Bradley's invitation to dinner that night; but I happened to be dining with a friend—one of those delightful

old Frenchmen who can anecdote away about almost any celebrity that ever lived. Upstairs in that little old restaurant his little old voice quavered of that lovely, lively lady, Rose Larose.

Yes, he, too, had seen her, when he was a little boy.

"In the old Café Lavenue it was, *monsieur*. I was sitting on a *banquette*, sipping grenadine, with my father. She came in, and the men gathered about her like flies on a tart; but she smiled over at me, and tossed me a kiss! Ah, *monsieur*, I dreamed dreams for many a night!"

He sighed reminiscently.

"Oh, yes, *monsieur*, yes—a blonde—a blonde; and everywhere she went she took her maid—a negress, black as soot, and horribly pockmarked—as a foil to her beauty. It made her seem, I thought—oh, like a golden angel!"

The old gentleman's smile was like the light from some distant star that had taken years and years to reach me. I poured him more red wine, and he pulled away at a piece of bread, telling me that nothing pleased Mlle. Larose more than to entangle some callow youth in her bright web—some one innocent enough to believe her the angel she looked.

"And happy husbands, too—oh, yes, yes, *monsieur*—even priests, too, sometimes. I heard of one poor simple soul—he thought her good, and he tried to save her. *Zut!* She and her clever maid, they played with men like dolls!"

So it was with an increased interest that I studied Bradley, the next day, when he took me to his new, luxurious, modern apartment in the Rue Schoelcher.

As we came into his huge, high studio, a young girl got up from an easy chair beside his great François Premier fireplace, and put down a black cat that had been in her lap. She welcomed us charmingly. Bradley kissed her on both cheeks, French style, and stood with his arm affectionately

about her, enjoying my patent admiration.

Nelly Faxon had been motoring, it appeared, with a young man whom he named as "Teddy," and they had stopped at the Café du Dôme for a glass of beer. When Bridley told her that the Dôme was no place for a nice young girl like her, she exclaimed poutingly:

"Well, I called at your Rue Bréa place first, Uncle Lester, to get you, but you didn't answer my knock!"

"Of course I didn't, Nelly dear. I told you never to go there, you know. I'm working awfully hard just now on my new novel, and I don't like to be interrupted. You must promise me, dear, never to go there again."

When we were left alone, Bridley, a little embarrassed, lowered his voice.

"I wonder if Nelly could have heard anything to-day—laughter, or anything?" Then, after some reflection, he continued earnestly: "Say, have you ever noticed that old hag who lives with the *concierge*? Why, she came up to my door one afternoon and tried to tell me something; but she's so deaf and crazy, you know, that I couldn't make out what she wanted. Well, as she stood there, just inside the door, mumbling something, the bedroom door opened and shut—apparently, of course, of itself; and there was laughter, too. The old lady let out a shriek to wake the dead; and how she ever got down those stairs so fast I can't imagine!"

Rather stimulating Bridley's life must have been, those days—afternoons, hidden away hugging-mugger in those shadowy, romantic rooms in the Rue Bréa, and evenings in his big, luxurious studio apartment, entertaining celebrities. Princely evenings, those were, when Lester Bridley showed how a gentleman could spend money, by Jove! Oh, nobody ever called Bridley a stick, nowadays!

All kinds of people come to one's parties in Paris. I was present at one

of his smart little dinners, which, with his new lavishness—champagne and Chambertin and immemorial brandies—rather got away from him. After a supposedly beautiful woman artist had pushed a world-known author pretty violently in the face, and had told him that he was nothing but a dirty little dime novelist, Bridley sent Nelly Faxon—all agog, she was, with the increasing wildness—upstairs with her young Teddy friend, to wait in the library. Teddy was of very good family, and Bridley had always fancied blue blood.

It was while the party was clearing the floor to dance, and the near-beautiful, tipsy lady artist was insisting on recounting a marvelous dream she had had the night before, that I yawned. Bridley evidently noticed it. He came up to me with an old bottle and a huge glass.

"Try some of this cognac, won't you? It's the real stuff—Louis de Salignac, 1824."

I told him that I'd rather look at his collection of first editions; and he led me up the balcony stairs. At the door of the library we looked in. Nelly and Teddy were sitting on a big red leather couch. His arm was about her. Her lovely face was a lovely pink.

"Rather pretty picture, isn't it?" said Bridley.

I peered round, over the top of a high chair.

"What are they doing?" I asked.

They were laughing. They were, to be exact, snickering; and they were reading a book together.

One look Lester Bridley gave at that black cover and gold label. He took three steps across the room; and then—permit me to remark that I have never seen a sleek and ritzy youth thrown out of a room and halfway down the stairs with more speed and accuracy. I've never seen a face turn so white as Nelly's. I've never seen a face turn so red as Bridley's.

As the strains of a mad orchestra

capered up from the riotous studio below, I think I have never heard a voice more heartbroken than the voice that said: "Nelly, give me that book!"

I made my escape. I left that laughing, dancing, drinking crowd, and went home.

### VIII

FOR many days I couldn't get Bridley out of my mind. I thought so much about him, in fact, that, not having seen him at the Dôme for more than a week, I decided, one sunny afternoon, to stroll up to the Rue Schoelcher and find out what had become of him.

As I approached his apartment house, I noticed a tall, oldish man just coming out. It was Hamelot—David J. Hamelot. For a moment he stood on the sidewalk with his hat off, scratching his curly gray head; and he had such a distorted, enraged expression that I stopped and watched him—watched him till he banged the door and drove off in his big black limousine.

Upstairs I found Bridley standing in front of his fireplace, unshaven and disheveled. The great sunny studio was littered with packing cases. He was moving out, he explained, at the end of the month. With what money he would have after he had sold his furniture, and the royalty payment that Hamelot had just brought—Bridley picked up a check for eleven thousand dollars from the table as if it was red hot—he had decided to help the Salvation Army build the new hostel they needed so much.

I sank down on a chair and looked at him blankly. Bridley pointed to the fireplace. On the logs was a mass of charred paper—sheets, and curling sheets, and more sheets, torn and scattered, and broken flakes—flakes of charcoal.

"My new novel," Bridley said quietly.

I couldn't take my eyes from that

place in the center, still faintly glowing. It was like a crimson heart. Then that, too, faded, curled, blackened.

"I just had time to destroy it before Hamelot got here," Bridley went on. "He made a pretty nasty scene—told me I'd burned up half a million dollars."

He dropped limply down in a big chair. After a silence that had lasted some minutes, he said that so long as I knew so much about his strange affair, he wanted me to know how it had ended. Poor Bridley seemed to think it might affect my opinion of him, somehow.

"Of course," he said dreamily, "after that time up in the library—you know, that night—I decided that I would never set foot in those rooms in the Rue Bréa again; but I was so distracted—I've walked over half of Paris, you know, and hardly eaten or slept for a week—that it wasn't till Hamelot phoned me about noon today that he was coming that I remembered that the manuscript of this new novel was down there. Well, I hoped and prayed that I'd have time to get it before *she* appeared!"

He shuddered.

"Well," he continued, "I jumped a taxi to the Rue Bréa, dashed upstairs, ran to my desk, and jerked open the drawer. The instant I had that manuscript in my hand, I heard the door open. I saw it open. I heard a laugh. She had caught me. In a flash her arms were around me. For a moment—just one moment—I confess I hesitated. Then I tore myself loose, some way—God, the way she clung to me, though! I struck out blindly at her—right into her, the harlot! I struck her down. She went down on the floor. She was lying there—there on the floor, I knew—on the floor, somewhere, but of course I couldn't tell just where, for I couldn't see her. I started to go—to get away, you know, and I—by God, I stepped on her! My foot stepped right into her. When I

looked down, I saw something there, indistinctly; and then all at once the sun came out. It shone through the window right down upon her, and by Jove, I saw that horrible wench as plain as—"

"Wench!" I cried. "Why, wasn't she beautiful? A golden-haired—"

"She was a negress," said Bridley. "She was a pockmarked negress!"

I was looking over the autumn list of new books, the other day, when I

happened upon a brief mention of Lester Bridley's latest novel. I forget the name of it.

"A clean, sincere effort," the critic said, "but rather stodgy and pedestrian—a piece of the usual Middle Western realism."

When I put down the paper, there must have been a curious expression on my face.

"To this author," the critic had concluded, "romance is evidently a closed book."

#### FISHERMAN'S SONG

Thy handiwork is pleasant, Lord,  
Thy handiwork is good,  
To such as care for flowered vale,  
Clear brook and emerald wood,

Where birds like living jewels  
Flash bright among the trees;  
Such sights I gladly yield to them,  
But give to me the seas!

The seas, whose stalwart combers  
Claw hard at hatch and port,  
With oily, foam-incrusted chill,  
Stark hands in deadly sport,

And sweep from bow to flagstaff,  
Death-spreading arms spread wide;  
Instinct with sullen majesty  
And girded round with pride.

The seas, whose yeasty surges  
March ceaselessly along;  
Their roaring blended with the gale  
In one great triumph song,

To hurl themselves with hungry howl  
And heaven-scaling spray,  
Upon the sentry crags that guard  
The mainland, stark and gray.

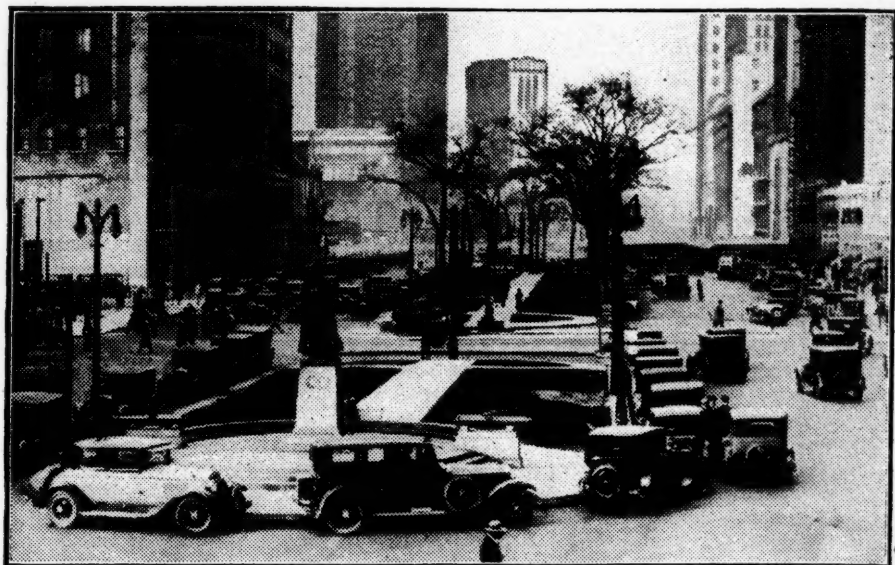
Let others praise the quiet rill,  
The mountain and the cloud,  
But let me sing of breakers white  
That burst in thunder loud;

That, rain-lashed, whip along the beach  
Wind-driven spindrift high,  
While dark before the stinging blast  
Storm-boding curlew fly.

*Daniel Jenkins*



# THE WORLD TO-DAY



WASHINGTON BOULEVARD, DETROIT, MICHIGAN

## “Dynamic Detroit”

*City Worth Three Billions and Its 1,500,000 Population—All in the Last Twenty-five Years—Wasn't Much Until F. O. B. Became Byword—  
Now Sky Seems to Be the Limit*

By Robert Mountsier



ETROIT, the capital of the automobile world, is the world's automobiliest city. It is full of used cars, being used cars and about to be used cars. Not only does Detroit stand far in the lead of all other cities in the production of cars, but it has more automobiles than pedestrians, and talks bigger and louder about automotive units than any other spot on earth.

It talks of automobiles in millions, of plants in acres of floor space, of suits in terms of patent infringement and two pairs of pants—for if you believe the tailors no man in Detroit is properly dressed unless he has two pairs of trousers to each suit, no matter whether he lives in a barge on the River Rouge or at the Detroit Athletic Club.

To tell the truth, Detroit is joyfully suffering from the superiority com-

plex. To quote its own words: "Detroit is beautiful, dynamic. It is a city of homes, modern ideas, activity, accomplishment, contented labor, generous capital and unlimited power."

#### THE FRENCH CROPS OUT

If a thing isn't bigger, better or more of it, then Detroit calls it "grand" or "belle"—zee boulevard, zee river, zee hotel, zee park, zee girl. Detroit, which took its name from "detroit"—strait—doesn't let you forget that there is French stuff in its blood and past.

What it doesn't "grand" or "belle" it "Cadillacs," from butter and barber to bank and car, because Le Sieur Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded Detroit with a few canoe loads of Frenchmen in 1701. But because Detroit didn't exist two hundred and twenty-eight years ago, and because twenty-eight years ago the automobile was an infant being suckled on gas, the city that made its F. O. B. famous from Kalamazoo to Timbuctoo and the land of the kangaroo is suffering from growing pains.

No single factor in Detroit's two centuries and more of existence brought about such a change in the place that grew out of the Frenchman Cadillac's village as the automobile—not even Chief Pontiac and his Indians' attacks, the first steamboat on the Great Lakes, the bicycle, the marine engine, patent medicines or prohibition.

#### BESIDES AUTOMOBILES

In a quarter of a century the automobile changed Detroit from a none too progressive country town, ranking not far from twentieth among American cities in manufacturing and population, to a Greater Detroit, which now has a population of over 1,500,000, an assessed valuation of more than three billion dollars, 3,600 manufacturing plants, and 32,000 business firms employing 375,000 workers and two billions of capital, and an annual manufactured output of \$2,750,000,000.

The main part of it all has to do with automobiles, even though this city boasts that it leads the world in thirty-five products and excels in more than one hundred and seventy-five industries. Not only does Detroit rank first with a production of two-thirds of the automobiles of the world, but it leads with soda and salt products, metal beds, disinfectants, varnish, adding machines, aluminium castings, electrical furnaces, porcelain insulators, coin machines, lubricators, *et cetera*.

It claims the largest patent medicine manufactory, the most stove factories, the biggest seed house, the leading white lead and color works, the best vacuum cleaner plant, and the factory turning out the most cigars. On a per capita basis it uses more plate glass than any other city in the world—from automobiles to acres of it for desk tops and office partitions.

So you see that when Detroit thinks and does, it thinks big, does big—bigger than any other place if it possibly can. No wonder Detroit has that feeling of superiority!

It can also feel superior about Belle Isle, its most beautiful park, and the Detroit River; the General Motors Building, one of the world's great office buildings; and the home of the Detroit News, which mechanically and architecturally rates as the finest newspaper plant in the United States. The new two-million-dollar Institute of Arts and the Public Library, with murals by Blashfield, are works of art—and so are the Detroit girls.

The city seems full of girls, girls, girls—brunet belles, blond belles, duco belles.

#### LIFE AND LIMB

But to come back to automobiles, for you can't get away from them:

The streets are full of them and of "no parking" signs, which your driving Detroiter ignores as thoroughly from six to six of the clock as he does the poor pedestrian. With a red and

green light system to regulate traffic on the main thoroughfares, the open season for pedestrians opens every time the signals flash from red to green with a dash of yellow.

There are no seconds of grace for the walker as Detroit's motor car drivers bend with tense nerves over their wheels, the cars toeing the white lines, as they wait for the signal to go.

Red to green, and they're off! Those afoot who aren't quick are dead—and this isn't all joke, for Detroit's daily and annual figures for those killed and injured by automobiles is appalling.

Detroit's method of traffic regulation seems to have been developed by those engaged in the city's automobile business in order to make all the others buy cars, and in the automobile capital of the world it is treason to own an automotive unit that isn't f. o. b.—less Detroit. Any one so poor that he must travel on his feet can expect no aid from the city's Community Fund or from the police.

#### HOW IT ALL BEGAN

So far as Detroit is concerned the automobile dates from 1894, when Charles B. King of this city completed his first gasoline-driven automobile. King made his tests on Belle Isle, with Oliver Barthel, Detroit engineer, as his first passenger, but he received orders to leave the park at 5 A.M., and not to travel faster than five miles an hour. A late spring freeze in 1895 cracked the water jacket of his car—the first of many such casualties to be suffered by automobile owners. This four-cylinder car King followed with a two-cylinder affair, which he sold to Byron J. Carter of Jackson, Michigan.

A young farmer named Henry Ford had been greatly interested in King's first car, and King watched many of Ford's early gas engine experiments. At a time when Ford's credit limit at a supply store was fifteen dollars, King gave him for inlet valves in his "contraption" four bronze valves which

had failed to function as exhaust valves in the King engine.

With the years came many companies. Some prospered, others failed. Other firms manufacturing complete automobiles or parts were born in various parts of the city to die or to be taken over by more powerful concerns, while Detroit's automobile production increased by phenomenal leaps and bounds, with large plants and mushroom suburbs, with skyscraping office buildings and hotels, with slummy homes for laborers and costly residences for new millionaires.

#### WHAT DETROIT WILL BE

Looking to the future, while developing her automobile industry, Detroit has been at work for some time to make itself the center of the country's aircraft industry. And, *à la* Detroit, it has to-day more and better airports, and what with Stout-Ford, Stinson-Detroit, Packard, Continental Motors and other companies, it produces more planes and aircraft motors than any other American city.

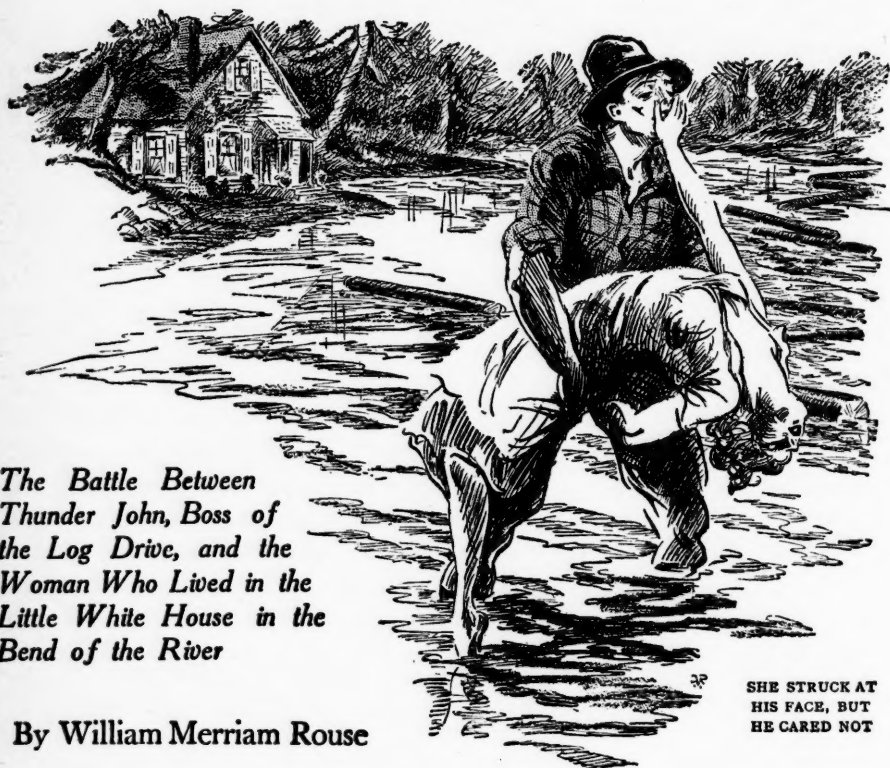
Detroit is—words fail us, but not "Detroit This Week," which says every week: "Detroit's location in the middle West, its broad streets and boulevards, its palatial residences, its many wonderful hotels and its safe waterways have combined to make it an ideal city in which to hold conventions.

"Detroit to-day is recognized as one of the interesting cities of North America to visit, and no delegation from foreign governments would think of visiting the United States without making Detroit the principal city on their tour. Detroit is destined to become a city of two million. Geographically we are well located.

"Our manufacturing industries have become great quantity producers; they have set out to establish a system of ultra efficiency.

"The business man who is looking for a place to settle down can find no better place than dynamic Detroit."

# The "Old Maid" of Dunder Falls



*The Battle Between  
Thunder John, Boss of  
the Log Drive, and the  
Woman Who Lived in the  
Little White House in the  
Bend of the River*

By William Merriam Rouse

SHE STRUCK AT  
HIS FACE, BUT  
HE CARED NOT

**T**HUNDER JOHN, like the river on which he worked, did not know defeat. They were kindred spirits, the Dunder River and John Curren. The river found only victory in its roaring, foaming spring attacks on the banks that tried to bind it; and the boss who was known as Thunder John Curren, had never failed to carry his log drive down from the lumber woods to Lake Champlain with the smallest possible loss of time and timber. Life yielded to him, as logs turned under the grip of his cant hook, until that spring when the river brought him and Amy Vetter

together and mocked them both.

Many times before this April had Thunder John taken his drive through the village of Dunder Falls, and Amy Vetter's little white house in the bend of the river below the falls had been only a little white house to him. This year it might stand in danger from the drive, because of a shift in the river banks, and when Curren arrived with his gang that was one of the first things he noted.

He stood on the rocks by the concrete dam and stared downstream, over the bridge, past the rapids, to the bend where there had been a low-lying flat since anybody could remember. Cur-



ren took note that even at this time of year, when there were ragged patches of snow in the fields and broken ice in the river, the white house was extremely neat. Its paint gleamed, and the little garden in front of it, though the flower beds were still brown and bare, showed every sign of careful keeping.

Thunder John moved the shoulders which found no shirt quite wide enough for them, and turned to his second boss, Joe Degraw, who was waiting for orders. Degraw lived in Dunder Falls when the logging months were ended, and he knew the people.

"Who lives down there, Joe?" asked Curren. "I mean that white house with green blinds, in the bend of the river."

"That's Miss Amy Vetter." Joe spat expertly through his mustache. "Ol' maid, her. She's got good dog for rabbit, but she won't hire him out for hunt."

"Huh!" Curren was concerned with logs, not rabbits. "Is she cranky, Joe?"

"Her?" This time Joe spat twice, right and left, which was an indication of uncertainty and deep thought. "Well, boss, I tol' you. She's funny woman, her—all time talk soft and nice, but I don't know if I want to have fight with her, me. No, by gar!"

Thunder John laughed. His blue eyes caught the sparkle of sunlight that played over the gleaming river. Some men were afraid of women, but he was not. If they were pretty, and you felt like it, you tried to kiss them. Otherwise they did not greatly matter.

He had no doubt of being able to brush aside this old maid in the bend of the river. It was from his deep-throated fury when anything stood between him and victory, and the lightnings of his eyes, that the name by which he was known from the deep woods to the broad waters of the lake had been given him.

It could not be said that the men of

Curren's bull-necked gang, who feared not even death itself, were afraid of him, but they did give him that respect which is paid only to a conqueror. Grizzled veterans of thirty springs on the river unquestioningly obeyed this young man who had been a baby when first they shouldered their peaveys.

"I'll have to go and see her, Joe," said Curren. "I'd like to talk to her about damages if we have to run the drive through all at once. It's easier to fix things beforehand."

"Good-by, boss!" Joe Degraw's eyes twinkled. "If you don't come back, bimeby I run those log for you!"

"If I don't come back, you can have my year's pay!" laughed Thunder John.

He swung down from the rocks with a scraping of spiked boots, and with the swift and powerful movements that were the wonder even of men bred to keep their footing on a rolling log.

## II

CURREN pictured an elderly lady with gray hair in ringlets and steel-bowed spectacles. Yes, and she would have a cat. He had no doubt that he could deal with her, since the river had made it necessary. If he could not, it would be her misfortune and not his. The drive was going through.

This year when the ice went out, pounding with the rumble of distant guns, the formation of the flats below the rapids had been changed. The Dunder, laughing like a pagan, had ripped a second channel through the flats above the little white house. There was a small island left standing wistfully between the main course of the river and the swift stream that had been created by pounding ice and an excess of melting snow and spring rain.

The waters met again near the white house, and went tearing on, but a part of the land that had belonged to the dwelling was dissolved and gone. The buildings and the garden were intact,

but the danger which had been present even when some optimist built in that location was greatly increased. No bulwark stood now between the house and what floods the Dunder might see fit to loose upon it.

Curren went up to a door above which a trellis arched. It would be covered with vines later, he supposed. It must be a pretty place in summer. He knocked. A dog came around the corner of the house and smelled of his legs. It was a dog whose ancestors had been mostly fox terriers, with a dash of hound—not a fat dog, as Curren had expected; and there was no cat in sight.

The terrier looked up and wrinkled his forehead. Thunder John reached down without haste and scratched behind an ear with knowing fingers. The dog wagged his tail.

Then the door opened, and Thunder John Curren experienced something of a shock. His first thought was that this old maid might be an old maid, but she certainly could get married if she wanted to. Her gray eyes were kind and warm and peaceful, and the hair he had expected to see in iron gray ringlets was parted and drawn down in a gleaming cap of brownish gold. She was all of twenty-five, perhaps more, and of course that was why they called her an old maid in Dunder Falls.

"Good morning," she said, and smiled.

Thunder John was furious that a little warmth streamed up his cheeks; but he had realized instantly that she was conscious of his admiring glance at her slender, gingham-clad figure.

"I'm John Curren, boss of the drive," he said a little gruffly.

"The one they call Thunder John!" Her eyes became grave. "Will you come in, Mr. Curren, and tell me what I can do for you?"

Without really intending to do so, Thunder John stepped inside. He found himself in a room such as he seldom saw—a room where a home

had been made. The floor was cheerful with the soft colors of a handwoven carpet. The walls and the woodwork were light, and the windows were gay with bright curtains. He faced a piano as he sat down in a comfortable chair at Miss Vetter's invitation.

The dog had followed him. It sat up and put its paws on his knee.

"Lie down, Tip!" commanded Miss Vetter.

Tip did lie down, but at Curren's feet.

"That's the first time I ever saw a dog mind a woman!" exclaimed Thunder John.

"Tip is a good dog," she said with a smile. "He likes you."

"I like dogs," returned Curren emphatically. Then he remembered his errand. He watched Miss Vetter's eyes, as he spoke, for signs of trouble. "I've come to see about the logs."

"Logs?" she echoed. "I haven't any logs."

"I mean about when we bring the drive down past here," he explained. "It may do some damage this year, on account of the change in the river bed."

"I had thought of that," she told him quietly.

"If I have to take them all through at once, to make the most of the high water, it may knock this house into a cocked hat," said Curren bluntly. "I thought I'd see about damages first."

There was silence for a time. It could hardly have been more than half a minute, but it seemed long to John Curren; for Amy Vetter's eyes had darkened, and, although they had grown even prettier to look at, they were dangerous. Thunder John knew all about danger in the human eye. He had seen it behind a suddenly drawn knife, and under chair and bottle and peavey handle swung at his head.

"Can't you let the logs through the boom a few at a time?" she asked at length. "I've always lived here. They've done that more often than not."

"Yes, ma'am," agreed Curren. "I can do it, and I want to, if the water's right; but this is a funny year. There's a lot of rain fallen, but I guess it's 'most over. Then, since they've lumbered off so much, the woods don't hold water as they used to. We can't depend on the river. If the water should start to fall, I'll have to trip the sluice gate at the dam and take the drive through all at once. Can't risk waiting!"

"Just why?"

She fired the question at him like a shot. Curren thought it ought to be clear, but he drew a deep breath and explained.

"Dunder Falls is the worst place on the river. If the water goes down to anything like normal before I get past here, the logs 'll be hung up, and it 'll cost the company I work for thousands to haul them by land. I've got to look out for my company!"

Her face had become drained of color, but not by fear. She met his gaze with a level scrutiny. It was as if she were sizing up the enemy.

"If you do have to trip the gate, my house will go?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'm glad you don't lie to me, anyway!"

"I don't see any use in lying, Miss Vetter."

Tip lifted his head and looked up uneasily into Thunder John's face. He was evidently puzzled by the change in the feeling of the room. Curren reached down and passed a hand over the dog's head.

"You've come with bad news, Mr. Curren!"

"The company'll pay for the house," he assured her hastily. "I've come to see what you think it's worth, in case we have bad luck."

"My home is not for sale."

John Curren recognized trouble when he met it. He remembered what Joe Degraw had said; but even an excessive damage suit would be better

than hanging the drive up along the banks of the Dunder River. Behind the boom of logs ironed end to end, which stretched across the mill pond above the dam, there was a fortune in good timber. The Dunder was blackened with thousands upon thousands of logs; and here was a hundred and twenty pounds of woman trying to make trouble.

"My drive goes through," he said, and there was the clang of iron in his voice. "House or no house, my logs go to the lake!"

"Do you think that is right?"

It was like a woman to go off on a side issue like that. He would rather have dealt with a dozen men.

"I don't say it's right for you to lose your house, Miss Vetter. I say it's right for the company to pay for it, and they will. I wouldn't work for 'em if they didn't."

"I love my home!"

He hoped she was not going to cry; and yet instinct told him that it would be much better for his ultimate peace of mind if she did.

"Of course you do," he said. "I never saw a place I liked so much."

"Not enough to have a little faith in high water!" She rose. "I know why they call you Thunder John; but I never was afraid of thunder!"

John Curren was distinctly shocked. This was such a quiet and amiable defiance. He grinned and rumbled his hair, which was a little darker than hers, and which lay in careless waves back from a broad forehead. He saw her looking at it, and wished he had stopped at the boarding house to consult the comb and mirror.

"I'll let you know in plenty of time, if you ought to move your things out," he said, as he moved toward the door. "I'll promise plenty of time, and I'll send my gang to help, if you want me to."

"I shan't move out, Mr. Curren."

He stopped, astonished. Then he recovered as he told himself that of

course a woman would say she would not move.

"I don't believe you'll want your nice things to go down the river, even if you can buy more," he told her. "After the gate's tripped you'll hardly have time to get out yourself."

"I don't intend to go myself," she replied, smiling faintly. "Good morning, Mr. Curren. I'm sorry Tip likes you so much!"

Thunder John found himself outside, with the door closed behind him. He worked his lower jaw, but no words came. This was a time to sear the air with an expression of his feelings, but he could think of nothing strong enough. The muscles about his normally good-humored mouth drew tight.

"I'll show her whether she'll move or not!" he growled, as he walked up the river road toward the village. "No woman can stop my logs!"

### III

By night every river driver in the gang of thirty odd men knew that the old maid in the bend of the river had defied the boss. All Dunder Falls knew it, too. Curren kept his own counsel, but of course he had been seen going there, the village had foreseen the situation, and Joe Degraw loved a little excitement.

The boarding house basement where the gang loafed, with the help of many villagers, was full of discussion. It hung upon the air heavily, like the thick layers of tobacco smoke. To a man, the river drivers were in sympathy with their boss. There was not one of them who did not risk his life time and again to get the logs down the river. They worked drenched in ice-cold water, they broke jams when a misstep meant death, they fought the river with everything they had in them.

On the other side, the village opinion was bitter. There were only a few who saw with the eyes of Thunder John Curren. Dave Elder, keeper of

the general store, and a power in the hamlet, was outspoken in his denunciation. He said it was a high-handed and outrageous piece of wickedness to destroy a home, logs or no logs. This gang of roughnecks thought they owned the river, but if they tried anything like that—well, they'd find out what was what!

John Curren laughed and said nothing. It was in his mind that the trouble would settle itself, for the water held, and even rose a little, during the day or two following his interview with Amy Vetter. He eased the logs down by mere hundreds, and they went plunging over the dam on the back of the brown waters. He detailed twice as many men as usual to the flats, and no jam formed in that treacherous bend.

A curious desire to protect Amy Vetter, and all that belonged to her, filled Thunder John. Old maid! Village people were all crazy, of course, but those of Dunder Falls must be worse than most. He told himself that he would bet a month's pay with any man that she could get married if she wanted to. He was indignant; yet his determination to take the drive through under any circumstances was in no way abated.

The weather held bright and clear for three days after Curren's arrival in Dunder Falls, and on the third day the water dropped half a foot. It went down suddenly, and in all the fair expanse of the heavens there was no hint of rain. That night Thunder John made his decision. He saw no course but to trip the gate and cast off the chains that held the boom.

The news was abroad in the village during the evening, and Dave Elder's store was open late that night, while men argued and worked up their wrath. Word was brought to Curren that there were threats, and Joe Degraw seemed to lose his previous enjoyment of the situation.

"It's fun when they make big talk,"



he explained to Curren; "but those storekeeper, Elder, mebbe he do more as talk."

"Let him!" Thunder John replied with a shrug. He wondered if the long, raw-boned first citizen of Dunder Falls had looked upon Amy Vetter with a discerning eye.

There had been nights when John Curren slept better than he did this night; and he was in a dark mood when morning came with another clear sky. While yet kitchen fires were being built, he was out with his gang. Sleepy-eyed people watched the river drivers as they clanked away from the boarding house, shouldering their pike poles and peaveys for the day's battle.

Thunder John went up to the dam. Black logs stretched out of sight up the river. More than a mile of them lay waiting. At his feet the Dunder curved evenly downward to break with a deafening crash on the rocks below the falls. It foamed creamily through the rapids and swept with invincible power past the white house in the bend. Tonight the chances were that the house would no longer be standing there.

Curren swung an arm and called Joe Degraw to him.

"Get a couple of sledge hammers and half a dozen men here," he said, and pointed to the planks of the sluice gate at their feet. "Knock 'em out at nine o'clock, whether I'm around or not. The men will be all set by that time. I'm sending part of the gang up the river and spreading the rest out the other way. You can follow down when you see some of the boys come in sight from above."

"Aw right, boss," said Degraw. "Where you going to be?"

"I don't know," replied Curren. "If the talk amounts to anything, and they try to stop the drive, they'll go after me first. That's why I said to trip the gate anyway. If anybody tries to stop you, beat 'em up!"

"Stop me an' half dozen river drivers?" echoed Degraw incredulously.

"Boss, you must get foolish on the head this morning! Me, I trip those gate!"

Curren laughed and walked away. He knew that when Joe Degraw's big silver watch marked nine o'clock, two sixteen-pound sledges would swing in unison against the planks of the gate. He could vision the planks tossing down on the suddenly released flood, and then the logs smashing against the white house.

Thunder John picked three giants whom he had seen fight, and stationed them where chains wrapped around a mighty elm held one end of the boom.

"Boys," he said, "at nine o'clock Degraw's going to turn her loose. Get ready to cast off. Let go when you see him swing a sledge."

The men looked at one another and grunted with satisfaction. They enjoyed a little trouble.

"At nine o'clock she goes!" replied one of them, and he turned and swept the village with a hopeful glance.

"If anybody tries to stop you, bust him in the jaw," said Curren.

"It 'll take more'n one of them villagers to stop us!"

"More than a dozen!" agreed Thunder John, with a grim smile, and he went slowly back into Dunder Falls.

It was now his job to go and warn Amy Vetter that for her own safety she must move. There was time enough to get her things out; he had told some of the down river men to wait for him at the bend.

He dreaded this interview. She would never let him speak to her again. A girl like that—a girl who could make a home like that—but the logs had to go through. He would like nothing better than to have some of the lunkheads in Dunder Falls try to stop him from taking his logs through!

His feet were laggard and his thoughts were all of the gray-eyed woman with the brownish gold hair, or he would have seen, as he went through the village, that glances and whispers

rippled behind him; that curtains were pulled back and faces peered from the houses. It was not until he was well down toward the boarding house by the bridge that he realized the presence of something unusual, and saw that a storm was gathering.

Fifteen or twenty men moved restlessly about at the entrance to the basement; a few of them carried shotguns or rifles. Dave Elder stepped forth as Curren drew near, and the others grouped behind him compactly. Elder was one of the rare specimens who both brag and make good. A shotgun lay across his arm, and his rugged jaw was set.

"We heard you was going to empty the pond and take the drive down this morning," he began. "Is that report right?"

Curren waited a moment before he replied. This was not a mob, for some of the men were among the most respectable in the village. Dave Elder's leadership had roused them, and it was a formidable thing.

"The drive goes down the river at nine o'clock," Thunder John told him.

"You know it's going to take out Miss Vetter's house, don't you?"

"I think it will. I'm going to move her and her things, and pay all damages afterward."

"You think you got a right to come through here and do what you please?" demanded Elder in a choking voice.

"The drive goes," said Curren quietly. "That's all I've got to say to you or anybody."

"No, it don't go!" Elder took a step backward and flung up his shotgun. "The boys are with me. You give orders to hold them logs, or you'll be sorry!"

Thunder John looked the storekeeper in the eye and smiled slowly, with his brows drawing down and his lips curling back against white teeth. Berserk lightning played in the blue of his eyes. He was going to take that shotgun and jam it down the throat of the

long-legged man in front of him. Then he would start in to bend those other guns over the heads of their owners. The fact that he might die in the process was of no importance to him. The drive would go through without him, he knew.

As he poised himself to swing forward, a cry struck through the darkness of his wrath, and he saw a slender form sway before him, clinging to Dave Elder's shotgun. Amy Vetter was fighting for the weapon, white-faced, rumped, a clawing little fury. Elder tried in vain to shake her off.

Curren broke the spell of his astonishment and leaped. With a back-handed slap he sent Elder spinning. Thunder John found himself holding the gun with Amy, and looking down into her eyes. They were very nearly black. Oblivious of the others, he took the shotgun from her, broke it, and threw the loaded shells away.

"We was doing it for you, Amy!" shouted Elder. "It's your house, ain't it?"

"I heard you'd try something like this," she panted, "and that's why I came up to the village! Yes, it is my house, but I don't want murder done for it. I'm not like the river drivers!"

She turned and walked away from the group of men. Without a backward glance she started for home. The power of her champions was broken; even Dave Elder stood with open mouth and hanging arms.

Thunder John let the shotgun slip out of his hands, down to the dust of the road. He followed Amy Vetter with long strides, but he did not catch up with her until she had crossed the bridge and turned to go home. She did not look at him. He fell into step and cleared his throat.

"You mustn't get in front of a gun," he said. "That fellow was just fool enough to shoot!"

"I knew it."

That was all. Her feet went swiftly down the road. Curren saw that they

were small and slender. How he hated this day!

With a light, sure step she left the highway, winding along the side of a hill, and went down to the flat. Curren followed. At a little distance he saw some of his men, leaning on their peavey handles. The brown river was gnawing at the bank where they stood watching him.

He looked upstream. High above the bridge, where the dam had been built at the top of a natural waterfall, he saw Joe Degraw and his guards standing by the sluice gate. Thunder John looked at his watch. It did not lack many minutes of nine o'clock, the appointed hour.

#### IV.

WHEN Curren and Amy Vetter came to the trellised doorway, she stopped and looked up into his face.

"Thanks for walking home with me," she said, and Thunder John knew that he was being dismissed.

"I'll have the boys come over and get your furniture out," he said awkwardly. "We haven't much time left."

"My furniture stays here," she told him.

"Be sensible!" Without intention Thunder John found that his voice had risen to a bellow, what with the steady roar of the river and his own seething emotions to combat. "You'd rather have the things you've got than the money for them!"

"I'd rather have my home than the money!" Just for an instant he thought her eyes softened with a hint of tears. "My hope is that something will happen to save it for us—for Tip and me!"

She went inside before he could reply, and the sound of a sliding bolt came to him. He saw Tip's puzzled face looking out through a window. A sharp, uneasy bark sounded in the house, and then there was silence.

John Curren went over to his men

and borrowed a peavey. He gave them no orders. When he got back to the house, it was five minutes to nine. He looked around. The sun gleamed on the rushing river, and the plaid shirts of the drivers were bright in the morning.

In five minutes a mighty flood would come down from the dam. The whole weight and force of the mill pond and all that was backed up the river for miles would be emptied over the rapids, and over the little island and the flat. The logs would come thick as jackstraws and powerful as battering rams. A forest would be hurled against the white house. The water alone would hardly be high enough to sweep it away, but the logs spelled doom to its very foundation.

Three minutes to nine! The boys could take care of themselves. There was no one on the road from the village, but the bridge was covered with people. Evidently Dave Elder and his men had decided that Amy Vetter had made her choice, and they were going to let her abide by it.

Curren had borrowed the peavey for the door, but at the last moment he hated to splinter the neat panels. On the little platform he swung back for impetus, and drove a muscle-padded shoulder against the door. The lock snapped, and the door shivered back against the wall.

Thunder John ran into the living room, where he had been before. It was empty.

He bounded up the stairway. A door stood open. He saw Amy Vetter sitting in a rocking chair by a window that looked up the river. Tip lay at her feet, and there was a book in her lap. Her startled eyes met Curren's, and then he had her in his arms. The book fell to the floor; Tip tore at his sleeve.

He leaped for the stairs. She struck at his face, but he minded that no more than he had minded Tip's teeth. He went down the stairs three at a time

and crossed the flat at a run, with Amy Vetter in his arms. In the safety of the roadway he put her down. She thrust away from him with both small hands against his chest. That was all right, now that he had got her out of the path of destruction.

He turned and looked up the river. A point of light swept in an arc over Joe Degraw's head. It fell, rose, fell. The planks were going, one by one.

"Just in time, Miss Vetter!"

Thunder John's voice died away. She was not there. Halfway across the flat he saw her running as swiftly as a boy. He blistered the air with an oath and sprang after her. Even the river drivers were moving back toward the safety of higher ground.

She got to the house before Curren could reach her. He heard the patter of feet on the stairs as he went through the doorway. Her voice came to him, broken with anguish:

"Tip! Oh, Tip! Where are you? Come, Tip!"

A whine and a sharp bark from above. Curren found her kneeling in the room from which he had taken her a few minutes before. Tip, in her arms, darted a frantic tongue against a cheek streaked with tears.

"Oh!" she cried. "The door must have swung to! He was shut in!"

Thunder John stood and looked down at her. He felt guilty. The thought of what it would mean to her to lose the dog stunned him. She had risked her life to come back for Tip. For a moment he forgot the river.

"I didn't mean to leave him," Curren began.

"No matter!" She rose with Tip in her arms. Revealed in her eyes Thunder John saw the suffering she had hitherto concealed from him, the tenderness she hid from the world, all the love she had given to the dog who loved her.

Without warning the house shook and swayed under the impact of a great blow. Amy Vetter's face suddenly re-

sumed its mask of calm. She brushed her cheek against Tip's smooth white head.

Another thundering blow struck, and a picture tilted on the wall.

"Hell's bells!" muttered Curren. "What next?"

For the first time in his life he did not know what to do; but he hesitated only for an instant. Down the stairs his boots thumped, and he was out on the doorstep. Water was over the flat, and the advance guard of the logs was coming. Already the main channel was spotted with them. A few were swinging inside the island and down the new pathway. For a third time the house shook.

Thunder John seized the peavey that he had left beside the doorway. As he stepped to the ground, water swirled above his knees. Each instant more logs found their way along the new channel. Those logs were what prevented him from carrying Amy Vetter ashore now; and they would make it impossible for Tip to swim. Curren could not carry her and fend them off. She could not breast the current; it took all of his great strength to stand against it.

She was behind him in the doorway. Tip, beside her, alternately growled and whined. Still her eyes remained calm.

"You'd better hurry," she said, "or you won't be able to get to the road."

"If you stay, I stay," he told her gruffly. "I can't carry a woman and fight off logs, but I can stay here and try to beat 'em!"

He saw something come into the depths of her gray gaze—something like the far glow of a friendly lamp through the night. Then a thirteen-foot hemlock headed straight for the trellised doorway, and Thunder John Curren stepped forward to meet it. He swung his peavey, with the cant hook clattering, and drove the spike at the end of the hickory stick against the oncoming log. It turned aside, scraped



a corner of the house, and sailed out of sight.

Fortunately the little white house stood with its ends up and down the river and its long side to the road, so that there was less of a front to defend. Curren was waist deep in the ice-cold water. He went forward, retired, worked to left and right, as the logs came. Most of them he was able to drive out of their course with a powerful thrust of the peavey. Some struck the house. A window smashed. He heard the crash and thud of objects falling inside.

A few minutes of this, and then the foaming rapids above the island were almost blotted out by the main body of the drive. The logs would come like that for an hour—two hours—Curren did not know how long. They would come faster than any living man could fend them away from the menaced house.

He went back to the doorstep. The water was breast high when he left it.

"We've got a chance, if they bump the house clear of the foundation before she's smashed," he said. "She'll stop somewhere in a jam, and maybe I can get you ashore."

As if to mock his attempt to be comforting, a log struck a corner of the building. Timbers creaked and groaned, and there was a sound of falling plaster.

"You could still go," said Amy in a low voice.

"What happens to you happens to me, too," Thunder John told her.

"Look!" she cried suddenly, and pointed. "They're coming!"

The head of the new channel, by the island, was blackened by tossing sticks of timber. They rose on end. They churned in a welter of foam. They formed a wall which moved down toward the house like the approach of an inevitable fate.

"We'd better go upstairs," said Curren.

He mounted behind her. She car-

ried Tip, who shivered as if he felt the closing in of a dark presence.

Together Curren and Amy Vetter walked to the window by which he had found her sitting as she watched for the drive. She clutched his arm, and Tip slid to the floor.

"John!" she screamed. "They've stopped!"

"A jam!" roared Curren, in his best river voice. "They're hung up between the island and the shore, and nothing short of dynamite 'll break a jam like that! The drive 'll go down the main channel!"

"Dear God!" murmured Amy Vetter. She sank into the rocking chair and, unashamed, let Curren see the tears that rolled slowly down her cheeks. "I knew He wouldn't let it happen!"

Thunder John had not known that it was possible for a man to feel as he felt at this moment. His feet were treading beyond the horizon of things as they had always seemed to be. He found that he was kneeling beside Amy's chair, and that he was looking up into the clear gray of her eyes as he sometimes looked, wondering, into the depths of starlit heavens.

"You—you—you're an angel!" he blundered with husky throat.

Her eyes grew very tender. As she gazed into his face, tears and smiles mingled with the glow that he had seen there once before. The distance between them grew less. Tip licked his ear. Her hand reached out and touched Thunder John's head.

"What nice hair you have!" she whispered. "All soft and fine, like silk!"

Then Thunder John Curren knew that Amy was not an angel, but a woman; so he got up and took her into his arms. Her face hid itself, but her hands clasped behind his neck. He stared out through the window at the solid wall of logs stretched across the channel.

"God bless 'em!" he muttered.



## Forage

*A Hitherto Unpublished Episode of the War—Revealing How the Hard-Boiled Eggs of the Third Battalion Got Square With a Fussy Lieutenant*

By L. V. Jacks



LEUTENANT VAN METER joined us one warm spring day when the breeze went to one's head like wine, and the sun was bright and the war looked like a great crusading adventure. Not that there were any saintly persons in our regiment—no; but the crusaders of 1100 and those of 1918 were one at heart. In 1100 they robbed and stole and drank more than they should, and so did we.

There was Jimmy McArdle, cherubic and plump, with his blue eyes and yellow hair, who enlisted in our first platoon. He had been a cowboy, and was a clever brand blotter. He arrived

at the recruiting post six jumps ahead of his county sheriff. Cattle rustling was the charge. He enlisted.

Then there was Cotton McGrath, huge and horny, white-haired, red-cheeked, hawk-eyed, hard-handed. He broke wild horses for a living. He was wanted for horse stealing, and he had stolen the horses—that was no secret. He enlisted.

In a fit of absent-mindedness Corporal Dick Wheeler had married two women in consecutive weeks. He enlisted. He thought the war with the Germans was a little less dangerous. There was some litigation going on when he shoved off for France.

Then there was Buddy Crowe. The

sheriff of his county came to the fort to take Buddy away. It seems that there was a girl at home. Her father was bent upon seeing her and Buddy legally married before we left for overseas. Buddy had written the old man a letter in which he said that he, Buddy Crowe, was dead. It was this letter that provoked action, but the sheriff got to Hoboken just in time to see us disappearing down the bay.

Then there was a weasel-faced, yellow-eyed savage called Nightingale, who was in the brig almost all the time he was in the army. He had been Uncle Sam's guest at Leavenworth for six years because he was too unreasonably skillful at splitting dollar bills. Later he died surrounded by a ring of dead German machine gunners, whom he had killed with knife and revolver. Six hundred years from now he may be canonized as one of the saints of the crusade of 1918.

Then there was Ivy, muscular and huge, but lazy, with his pallid freckles and his skim-milk blue eyes.

"Me, I'm Kid Ivy, from South Omaha. I'm tough, I am!"

That was his estimate, oft repeated. He was tattooed all over till he looked like a tornado in a picture gallery. Sergeant Hans Jensen broke a rifle across his head the day after he enlisted, and thereafter he was less obstreperous.

While our company was at Fort Cook, and I was on the recruiting squad, a judge in town summoned before his court all the prisoners who had minor charges, and gave them their choice—ninety days on the rock pile, or enlist in our third battalion, then stationed down at the fort. One and all they took to the rocks.

I mention these facts, not because they are bound up with my story, but to prove indisputably that Lieutenant Harrison Van Meter was out of his depth when he was assigned to our crowd. He was a good boy.

Wentworth Hackett had enlisted be-

cause he was reeling drunk and didn't know any better. Corporal McLain had enlisted out of a big bet, after he lost eight hundred dollars in a crap game in South Omaha. Pinky Caruthers had enlisted to get out of going to work; but Lieutenant Van Meter went into the crusade of 1918 to make the world safe for democracy. He told us so.

He proved his democracy by doing his soldiering at Snelling, and getting a commission, so that he could lord it over the rest of us. Many of our boys, having known him at home, refused to take him seriously, and thumbed their noses at him when they met. Then he got hard-boiled.

He was handsome enough, with his black hair and brown eyes, and he had a good figure in uniform, but he was a persistent irritation and a pest. He was always enforcing rules. How we wished he'd be transferred!

To cap the climax, he wanted to put down blasphemy and craps; but his brother officers rode him when he got to that point, and rumors of what they said to him floated out of officers' mess and aroused mingled merriment and profanity in the ranks.

He also had an A. B. Other soldiers had made this mistake, but they never talked of it. I had my doubts about him, but I said nothing. I was the second line sergeant then, and I had to conduct a class in Morse and Continental codes, manage a wigwag outfit, and drill some rookies in the parlor trick of rapid fire at three hundred yards, besides other little duties too numerous to mention.

## II

WHEN we landed at Le Havre, Lieutenant Van Meter's admiration for the French knew no bounds. Some old folks took him in one day and gave him a cup of coffee, and after that it was French generosity day and night.

Cheating himself, he was. He told the sergeants about the kindness of our

noble allies, and lectured us severely on letting the men plunder.

It was not politic to argue with a man who had both a commission and an A. B. His greatness had gone to his head.

The other officers were nearly as sick of him as the enlisted men; but how could they stop him? Our first looie, Ezra Tompkins, who had served as man and boy for thirty years, and had three or four Spanish and Philippine bullets tucked away in his anatomy, said feelingly to me one day:

"Sergeant, I'd give a month's pay if somebody would work that son of a skunk for a good sell. We'd laugh him out of the regiment!"

"What about a court," I suggested, "if Van Meter thinks it's too raw?"

"By God," said Tompkins, "I'll protect you. All the officers in the company will protect you. Go ahead!"

I laughed at that, for I had been only joking, but just the same the idea stuck in my mind as I walked away. Of course, in the draft regiments, where the men didn't know one another so very well, and were officered by shoe salesmen and insurance agents, said officers stood on their dignity—as they had little else to stand on, certainly no knowledge of war—and consequently there was little conversation or friendship exchanged. In old outfits like ours, that had been together for years, and knew one another all around, there was an evenness feeling; and that was another reason why a snob like Van Meter grated on every one's nerves.

At the same time, one couldn't do anything that would disrupt discipline; and hence the difficulty. Though Tompkins might protect us after the deed was done, he certainly would take no part, least of all a financial one, for he was notoriously stingy.

But Lieutenant Van Meter got his.

You may remember that in June and July of 1918 the Germans launched

two great offensives against our lines. The Marines stopped the first and the Rainbow jammed up the second. When this second attack, on July 15, had gone to pieces, the counter attacks began; and after some weeks of hard fighting our regiment was pulled off and started for another sector.

On the evening of the second day's march we halted at an old French farm. The Germans had held it since March, and with true German thrift they had planted a big field of potatoes. We all shouted when we saw that field. Canned beef for days on end grows tiresome, to say nothing of producing enteritis and inspiring homicidal impulses. We started in to dig up the potatoes, and our hungry men promised themselves a feed.

The digging had been going on for perhaps two minutes when some one came up and said we would camp there that night. A couple of ambassadors from other regiments in our brigade walked up the road behind us, while some of our men straggled out to confer. I watched them. They seemed to be inviting ours to join them in some enterprise—probably a crap game; and ours were refusing with sad looks, doubtless due to the prevailing lack of cash. We had not been paid in months.

When the strange soldiers had turned away in disappointment, I saw three of our men—Cotton McGrath, Pinky Carruthers, and Wallace Hord—holding a desperate conference. I've told you what kind McGrath was. Pinky had a high, parrotlike face, thin features, carrot hair, pale blue eyes, and a superabundance of freckles. He was an adept at getting something for nothing.

Hord had formerly been a sailor. He had sailed all the seas there are, and some that aren't on any map or chart I ever saw. He spoke half a dozen languages and knew scraps of twenty more. He was fluent in French, of a sort, for his maternal grandfather



was a Cajan, as they call them in certain parts of the South, and French had been the household tongue. He could assume a delightful French accent when he wished. He was a sturdy, square-jawed fellow, with hard gray eyes that had a yellow gleam.

Finally I heard Hord say:

"There are some fellows in A Battery that have the equipment. I'll try."

He turned away into the blackberry thickets by the roadside. I was puzzled by his remark, for we all had equipment after a fashion, though the German barbed wire had made some fearful and wonderful rents in it.

In the meantime the potato digging carnival raged; and at last, fifteen minutes later, it brought out the owner of the farm. He must have been chopping some wood in the little shed beyond the clearing. He still had his ax, and some chips were clinging to his clothes. I had little time to look him over, though, for he was in a great temper, and came down on us with some furious gesticulations. It always made me laugh to see a Frenchy angry, but before we were through with this fellow we were laughing on the other side of our faces.

He wore the blue blouse which so many French working men affect, and which is always associated in my mind with barricades, and cockades, and tricolors, and those wrong-headed enthusiasms that the French sometimes permit themselves. He had a dirty white cap with a broken visor, and loose khaki breeches. On his feet were grease-streaked and earth-stained American hobnails.

He looked about for a moment, and then picked out Lieutenant Van Meter. There was no other commissioned officer around. He went up to Van Meter, and the conversation that followed was short but sharply to the point. Equipped as he was with very broken English, the Frenchman nevertheless made himself understood with an acidulated clarity.

"These potatoes that your men are stealing belong to me," he said—I cannot reproduce the phonetic butchery.

"Wha--a-a-at?" cried Van Meter.

He understood well enough. He was stalling for time. It did him no good.

"Your men are stealing my potatoes. You must pay me for this damage. Stop your men!"

You can bet your nethermost dollar that Lieutenant Van Meter checked the potato raid. Our men gathered around, angry and extremely vocal.

"The Germans have held this place since March, or before," Van Meter told the peasant. "They planted the potatoes. We recovered the land from them only last week."

"The crop was planted on my land, and French law makes it mine. I want a thousand francs for this damage!"

A howl of anger spluttered from the surrounding men, and we had visions of being liberally fined. A thousand francs, according to the then prevalent exchange, was about a hundred and seventy dollars. We certainly had not taken more than ten or eleven bushels altogether, making the plunder cost us roughly about sixteen dollars a bushel. We thought that was highway robbery. Buddy Crowe volunteered the information that potatoes didn't cost as much as two dollars a bushel in Ravenna, Nebraska, when he enlisted.

Lieutenant Van Meter's hesitation, and his evident indecision, emboldened the men to offer advice. They suggested a number of remedies, the common denominator of all being that the farmer should be hung, drawn and quartered, flogged, flayed, boiled in oil, and finally impaled according to the good old Tartar method.

Just then Lieutenant Tompkins came up the road in the distance, and I suspected that some one had run to tell him what was occurring. Cotton McGrath dashed out, saluted, and then went up close to Tompkins and said something; and Tompkins ducked. I knew he was tight in the pocketbook,

so I guessed that he meant to leave Van Meter to his fate. It was a nasty way to treat a brother officer. Cotton McGrath was getting revenge for extra duty Van Meter had put upon him.

All this acrimonious and profane babel had produced one distinct result. Van Meter saw that he would have to do something, for the Frenchman was standing his ground, very defiant.

He was a dauntless fellow, squarely built and stocky. He had fierce, direct-looking gray eyes with a gold-yellow fleck in them, bushy eyebrows, and a square jaw. His mustaches seemed a little out of plumb, and his face was very grimy and dirty, but that did not alter his eagle gaze or his sturdy independence. He had none of the hang-dog look that so many of the country people wore.

The more I inspected him the more I thought I had seen him before, but I couldn't place him to save my soul. I solved it for myself by saying that many refugees followed along behind the American army, and reoccupied their homes as soon as the Germans were driven off. Doubtless I had seen him somewhere behind the lines.

Van Meter tried to beat the Frenchman down, but had little luck. The peasant said he realized that Van Meter had plenty of brute force at command, but right was right, and if he was mistreated he would put in a complaint with the nearest A. P. M. They argued for five minutes. Then our men were behaving very threateningly, and the Frenchman's nerve gave way. He weakened, and when Van Meter offered him five hundred francs to go away and forget about it, he said:

"Bon!"

He took two new two-hundred-franc notes and some smaller paper, and he even wrote out a receipt in a very scratchy script, and signed it. I saw the sheet as he handed it to Van Meter, and I thought the signature was Victor Hugo. I was staggered to think that one of the great novelist's

descendants might be in such straits; but I knew that the war had impoverished many fine French families.

However, it was his funeral, and a good funeral, too, seeing that he got five hundred francs for potatoes that cost him nothing. I figured that he had robbed Van Meter, and said so. Pinky Carruthers agreed. He had been threatening the Frenchy profanely. Then I saw a sudden dangerous light in his eye. Pinky's quick wit had suggested a way to make money. He stepped forward and staggered Van Meter with one of the coldest-blooded proposals I ever heard.

"Sir, that man just cheated you," Pinky said, saluting sharply, and looking Van Meter squarely in the eye. "Private McGrath and me will go through the wood there"—indicating with a back-handed gesture the forest into which the peasant was walking, ax in hand, to resume his wood chopping—"and we'll hold him up, or shoot him, and get your money back, if that's all right."

"An easy way to finance a crap game," I thought to myself. "You'd want a good tip for that!"

"Why, of course it's not all right," Van Meter stuttered. "That's murder. Don't you dare to mention such a thing again! We are supposed to be gentlemen in this outfit."

Pinky was as red as a beet all over his face and down his neck, and I guessed that he didn't like Van Meter's answer a bit, but he stood up as obstinate as a pig.

"A good soldier, sir, should always stand by his officer, and you were badly cheated, if you don't mind my saying so. Them spuds ain't worth five hundred francs, or half of it."

There was something about that loyalty gag that was too damned good to be true. Patriotic as he was, Van Meter must have suspected it.

"No," he said irritably. "Now you get out!"

Pinky saluted and turned away.

"The damned fool!" he exploded under his breath. "When I try to save his money again, I don't!" The men around were silent. Some of them had also thought of Pinky's scheme, but none had been bold enough to mention it.

### III

Two minutes later, after he had edged away a bit, Pinky suddenly broke for the wood. Van Meter saw him, and yelled to him to come back; but Pinky was too far off. Either he actually didn't hear the command, or he thought he was far enough away to disregard it.

He lurched forward, took a hitch at his cartridge belt and gat, and disappeared in the wood. There was an instant of agonized indecision. For one fleeting second Van Meter was a Dutchman who felt himself cheated. Then he became once more an officer and gentleman by act of Congress.

"You go after Private Carruthers, and bring him back," he said to me.

I went. There was an official sternness in the lieutenant's tones, but I could see that he was scared half to death. He was afraid that a murder would soil the fair name of our outfit. It was darned little our boys cared for that fair name stuff; but I ran.

In a few minutes I struck a path through the trees, but there was no sign of Carruthers. I circled through the wood at high speed. I called, but received no reply. Worst of all, there was no trace of the Frenchman. I started looking behind bushes for his body. I reflected that Pinky might have taken a quiet way to dispose of the grasping fellow.

The trouble with this stick-up stuff is that Europeans don't understand it. If you shove a gun into an American's face, and tell him to stick up his hands, generally he'll do it; but a fool European is just as likely as not to try to run, or to fight. That means shooting.

I was in a cold sweat. Not that I

cared a damn for Pinky or the Frenchy, but I knew that if anything went wrong, and it was hung on our outfit, Lieutenant Van Meter would be just as easy to get along with for the next six months as a bear with a toothache. I imagined I saw dead and dismembered Frenchmen behind every tall tree. It was getting on my nerves.

Then I came out on a little glade. In the center kneeling, on the thick green grass and fallen leaves, and swarming around a blanket, were twenty to thirty soldiers. As I came upon them they looked up, and I saw from their collar insignia that most of them were out of one of our companion regiments; but we had three representatives—Pinky Carruthers, Cotton McGrath, and Wallace Hord.

Hord's sea-gray eyes with the yellow gleam in them were as bold and defiant as ever. His jaw was squared, and his face was dirty and grimed. I knew I had seen that face recently. Across his upper lip was a pale red mark, as if something lately glued on had been jerked off roughly, taking one or two little patches of skin with it. He was in regulation uniform, and was just laying a new two-hundred-franc note beside the bones.

I looked him straight in the eye, and he returned the stare.

"Seems to me I just saw that two-hundred-franc note," I remarked.

"Lots of people have two-hundred-franc notes," Pinky put in cheerfully.

For one fleeting instant Hord's left eyelid quivered almost imperceptibly. What could I do?

The perpetrators were never discovered; but every officer in our regiment knew all about it before the sun went down, and chuckled fiendishly or guffawed rudely, according to his nature; for Ezra Tompkins had spread the news that Cotton McGrath imparted.

Before we swung into the great Oise-Aisne battle—mother, take down your service flag!—Lieutenant Van Meter had transferred to the S. O. S.

# The Triumph of Thomasine

By J. S. Fletcher



"ARE YOU THE EDITOR?"  
"I WAS," HE ANSWERED.

*We Must Warn Ambitious Girl Authors  
That We Have Never Known an  
Editor Who Reacted Like the Bright  
Young Man in This Story*

**T**HOMASINE O'CONNOR had been pretty badly disappointed in love, so she ran away from home and went to London, with a very slender balance in the Post Office Savings Bank and an unquenchable resolve to make her own living and be independent of all men forever.

It was a pity that no one reminded her, before she started, that she was that unfortunate anomaly of modern growth, a clever young woman who had not been specifically trained. She could sing a little, play a little, dance a little, and typewrite a bit. She had possibilities in her; but she lacked concentration, she had not found herself, and she had never quite made up her

mind to do one thing particularly well.

By the end of her first fortnight in London her unlimited self-confidence, which was Thomasine's best asset, had procured her a post as typewriter in a West End solicitor's office at twelve shillings a week. She had asserted her speed to be a hundred words a minute, imagining, in a burst of hopefulness, that it could not possibly be less, although, as a matter of fact, she had never taken the trouble to find out exactly what it was.

It was unfortunate that the very day—a week after her engagement—when she had put it to her employer that, since she seemed to give him every satisfaction, an increase of salary would be only reasonable, he should take it into his head to time her speed, and find that it scarcely came to thirty words a minute. An extremely unpleasant little interview ensued. He



told her that she had got her situation under false pretenses. Thomasine replied that he could not expect to hire proficiency at a starvation wage; and at the end of the fortnight she was once again upon the market.

Her next engagement was a companionship to a "young lady." She was required to accompany the young lady on expeditions to museums and picture galleries, to "know her London well," and to discourse with historical and geographical intelligence on everything they saw.

She embarked on her new duties with enormous cheerfulness and courage. Her unlimited self-confidence inspired the family with trust; but on the first day of her engagement, Thomasine and the young lady were missing at lunch time. They reappeared in time for tea, the charge a little sulky and aggrieved, the companion undaunted. In the evening, when it was put to Thomasine to explain why a lady "knowing her London" inside and out should get into the Bakerloo Tube for Belgrave Square, and ride triumphantly to Waterloo, a little altercation followed; and Thomasine remarked with spirit that, since she did not seem able to hit off their requirements, they had better part.

The result of giving Thomasine "another chance" was a little scene at the British Museum, in which she was overheard by a member of the family descanting, in answer to a question from the young lady, on the Elgin Marbles.

"These," said the companion, a little fluttered at the suddenness of the demand, "were executed by the unaided hand of Mr. Elgin, a person of impatient disposition, who undertook things which he seldom finished, and who was a famous statesman in the reign of—well, roughly speaking, William and Mary."

Thomasine was once again upon the market; but, strange to say, her bound-

less self-confidence had remained unshaken by her vicissitudes. This time she sought the counsel of a tried and trusty friend.

"Why not start writing?" Mrs. Montague said. "Your letters are graphic and original. Some famous man—I can't remember who—said that this was the first test of a capacity for authorship. You're clever, Thomasine, you're self-confident and amusing—why not make a start? There's no harm in trying, anyway. You never know what you can do till you've tried. At least you've had some experience of life."

"Life!" exclaimed Thomasine, thinking of the faithless lover. "I should like to meet any one of my age who's had more experience of life!"

She agreed that she was amusing, that—yes, she supposed she had a certain reputation for letter writing—in short, that she would try her hand.

"Fortunes are made in stories for the magazines," added the confidential friend. "In a day's work, Thomasine, you could make twice or three times the money you could ever make as typewriter to a tiresome man, or companion to a fussy woman. Make a start, keep your eyes open, don't be afraid to launch out boldly, and let me see what you can do. You can rely on me, dear, to tell you exactly what I think."

Thomasine was quite excited. Before nightfall she had drawn a pound out of the savings bank, hired a cranky typewriter, and bought a goodly stock of paper, notebooks, envelopes, and pens.

That night she sat up until twelve o'clock, for she felt that it would be wrong to stem the tide of inspiration which flowed in such abundance from her pen. Besides, said Thomasine to herself, to burn midnight kerosene is to be a "true devotee at the shrine of art," as she had seen it put somewhere.

At twelve o'clock she had finished her first tale, and was trembling from

the evaporation of emotion. How long it was she did not know, but it seemed to Thomasine to contain many, many thousands of precious words. All the miseries and mournfulness which life could yield and Thomasine could remember she had amassed and poured out in a flood of lurid depressingness. She completely put aside her own humor and audacity, her confident and cheerful way of looking at things, and dwelt upon the agonies, tears, and tortures of mankind.

"It must be great and human," she murmured to herself, finding her own eyes wet. Delicious agony to bring tears of happy parentage into one's own eyes!

At this delirious point, Thomasine's landlady, who had been seething upon her lodger's mat in uncontrollable annoyance at the expenditure of gas, looked in, perceived the mass of scattered paper, and asked if she was addressing envelopes.

"Oh, no!" said Thomasine with staggering dignity. "It's not addressing envelopes, Mrs. Poynter; it's—it's authorship!"

By noon of the following day the cranky typewriter had ground out a decent copy of "The Tragedy of Theresa." By four o'clock the manuscript was in the hands of the confidential friend. She sent her "candid verdict" by return of post. How Thomasine blessed that trusty woman!

"It is great and human," wrote the trusty friend. "How you think of it, I can't imagine!"

"Great and human!" ejaculated the new author. "My own words! How strange!"

"I am sure," the letter continued, "any magazine would *jump* at it. You have *got it in you*, Thomasine. You will get there, if you keep pegging away!"

"You are a truly great critic," Thomasine wrote back, also by return, her very soul overflowing with an almost hysterical gratitude. "I agree

with every word you say. Why don't you go on the papers as a critic? You would make a fortune. Don't be afraid," she ended, "about my not pegging away. I have got it in me, I believe. All that is now needed is a fierce endurance, and time, that softener of all ills."

## II

THE editor sat at his desk in the office of *Nature's Mirror*. It was his day for reading manuscripts, and he was surrounded by a sea of bulky envelopes. He was extremely young, very bright, a curious mixture of ideals and practicability, and full of an inspiring zeal. It was a stroke of uncommonly good luck to find himself, at twenty-four, editor of a popular magazine; but Carrington Cleveson, the proprietor of *Nature's Mirror*, had a peculiar knack of getting hold of enthusiastic young fellows with something in them, and of getting that something out of them as fast as possible.

"I know it's a good berth, sir," he said to Cleveson. "I mean to stick to it and make a name for myself!"

"Stick to us," said Cleveson, "and we'll stick to you, my boy!"

*Nature's Mirror* had prospered under young Marcus Monkman, and it reflected something of his beaming enthusiasm back into the world's face. He knew the readers of the magazine just as a doctor knows, from a patient's pulse, every heartbeat of the man. He must have known them by instinct, somehow, for nobody had taught him the symptoms of the public taste. He had a peculiar delight in crushing out contributors who either could not or would not gauge the wants of *Nature's Mirror*, and a peculiar knack of luring the best "stuff" out of Cleveson's favorite authors. He was proud of his post, proud of Cleveson's approbation, and not a little proud of his own cleverness.

This morning he had been sorting

out certain stories for reconsideration, a few as definitely suitable, and others as clearly out of the question. After about half an hour of this work he opened a small but bulky envelope. It was far smaller than the usual size for folding manuscripts, and the editor did not know what to make of it when he took out a typescript folded several times into a thick square, and glanced at it.

The story was typed in a very amateurish way, and the paper was pierced with a large hole at the right-hand corner, and tied up with ribbon. Young Monkman had sisters, and he recognized that it was washing ribbon, of the kind that petticoats and things are threaded with. He read the letter inclosed, which ran thus:

DEAR MR. EDITOR:

I do hope you will find space for the inclosed contribution in *Nature's Mirror*. I think I may say, with all due modesty, that you will find it a good deal above the average of your usual contributions. A certain critic has said of my little tale that "it is truly great and human"; but I must leave this to your judgment. I shall hope to hear from you by return of post, if possible, or some time to-morrow, and that your decision will be favorable.

With kind regards,

Always yours sincerely,

IONA.

There was no stamped and addressed envelope inclosed, the length of the story submitted was not mentioned, the author confidently expected a decision by return of post, and she signed herself "Iona" with the calm assurance of an established Ouida!

"Unfortunate woman!" the editor exclaimed in genuine horror. "Is it possible that such things are still done?"

Partially smoothing out the crinkled sheets, he looked at the first page of the story, and ran his fingers through his hair. Then he glanced at the last page, and uttered a low groan.

One afternoon, at the end of a fortnight from the launching of Thomas-

ine's first literary dreadnought, her landlady appeared beaming at her door.

"It's fat, and it's rather like a lawyer's letter," she remarked. "You wouldn't surprise me if it was a legacy."

Thomasine tore open the envelope. Around "The Tragedy of Theresa" was wrapped a printed form, expressing the editor's thanks for the offer of the manuscript and his regret at having to decline it.

With tears in her eyes Thomasine wrote off to the trusty friend. By return, for Mrs. Montague did everything by return, she received the following message:

Keep up your heart. This is your first reverse. Keep on firing broadsides into them, and remember that you *have got it in you!*

By this time Thomasine had completed and typewritten another tale, entitled "The Sorrows of Sophia," and the joys of renewed parentage had consoled and fortified her for her disappointment in her first-born. Before nightfall she had fired "The Sorrows of Sophia" like a broadside into *Nature's Mirror*, with the accompanying note:

DEAR MR. EDITOR:

Although not in the least discouraged by your inability to recognize merit in "The Tragedy of Theresa," I confess to being rather hurt by your curt way of returning it—after some delay, and without explanation. I now send you "The Sorrows of Sophia," which I regard as the best story I have yet written, and which I think you will accept. In any case I wish you would express some criticism which might prove helpful to me and might serve to show me how I have incurred your disapproval.

Confident of an early reply,

I am yours always,

IONA.

So confident, indeed, was Thomasine that she went out forthwith, and on the strength of "The Sorrows of Sophia," she ordered a large packet of visiting cards to be printed bearing one

golden word—"Iona." This made her feel that she had taken another step upon the road to greatness.

Three days later "Sophia" came back like a prodigal daughter. Wrapped about her was a letter from the editor to Thomasine:

DEAR MADAM:

You asked me for a criticism of your stories. Contributors are not in the habit of making such a demand upon the editor to whom they submit their matter, and, if they do, editors are not in the habit of taking any notice of them. However, since you press me for an opinion, I am obliged to tell you that your work is amateurish, dismal, lacking in humor, totally devoid of regard to real life as it is, and in my opinion not only utterly unsuited to our requirements but equally unsuited to those of any other magazine.

I am, dear madam,

Yours faithfully,

THE EDITOR.

Thomasine first wept her wrath out in a flood of tears, then poured it in a flood of indignation on the trusty friend.

"Don't mind what the silly old thing says," wrote the consoling Mrs. Montague. "They get such a lot of nonsense shot in at them that they have neither the heart nor the time to read the more serious and artistic contributions. My own impression is that he *has never read your story.*"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Thomasine, on receiving this letter. "What an intuition that woman has! I might have thought of that. What he says about my work is proof positive that he has never looked at it!"

She cogitated deeply, and a look of adventurous audacity sprang into her eyes.

### III

"WHAT'S that?" said Marcus Monkman a day later, raising a ruffled head from his desk, as an office boy appeared. "Letters?"

He ran through the mail. Midway he paused, stared, and uttered a wild exclamation:

"What, *again?*" he cried. "Here I have only just recovered from 'The Tragedy of Theresa,' when 'The Sorrows of Sophia' is thrust upon me. I have just cast 'Sophia' into outer darkness when 'The Morbidities of Maria,' very likely, shows its head!"

For it was unmistakably Iona's writing. This time the envelope was larger and thicker, and seemed to contain cardboard. A kind of humorous despair, coupled with a morbid curiosity to see what Iona was capable of perpetrating, came over the editor. He opened the envelope. It contained a photograph of a young girl in a white dress, with "Yours sincerely Iona," scrawled across the chest and arms.

Monkman's cheeks grew crimson.

"Alas, poor Iona!" he exclaimed, poring over the dainty, saucy face, with its lovable lines and irresistibly sweet features. "Alas, my poor little Iona!"

He looked around, to make sure that no one's eyes were on him. Then he put the photograph into his breast pocket and turned to the typescript inclosed. It was "The Sorrows of Sophia" come back to roost. He laid it upon a pile of manuscripts which were to be put into type as soon as possible.

The same evening found Thomasine reading a letter, her whole face tremendous with the incredible ecstasy she felt:

DEAR MADAM:

In "The Sorrows of Sophia" allow me to suggest to you that you have found yourself at last. Your touch has gained in firmness, your style is crisp and mellow, your characterization is true to the type that you strive so faithfully to represent. I should be glad to learn what terms you would accept for the story, and should be pleased to consider more stories from your pen.

Yours faithfully,

THE EDITOR.

Some months later a taxicab drove up to the office of *Nature's Mirror*, and Thomasine, getting out, inquired if she could see Mr. Monkman. She no-



ticed that at mention of the editor's name the attendant grinned with pointedness.

"Yes, you can see him," the attendant said. "He's there on the doorstep."

The editor was not going in, but out. He was walking slowly, with his head bent. Thomasine hurried after him.

"Are you the editor of *Nature's Mirror*?" she said.

"I was," he answered.

Thomasine paused. She felt that she was on delicate ground.

"We have had some correspondence," she began. "I wanted to ask you something."

She took out her card case and handed him a card.

"Iona!" he exclaimed. "I felt quite sure—"

Thomasine bowed her head.

"I am no other," she answered.

"You have published a series of my stories."

"I did," he answered.

She thought she heard him drawing a deep sigh.

"I sent you a signed photograph," she continued, "a few months since, and, in spite of repeated letters asking for its return, I have not been able to get it back from you."

Young Mr. Monkman became extremely red.

"It must have been mislaid," he muttered.

"That was extremely careless!" answered Thomasine, with proper severity.

He admitted that it was.

"It was the only copy that I had," she continued. She paused. "There was one other matter which I should like to have cleared up. Perhaps you can throw some light upon it. Directly after submitting 'The Tragedy of Theresa' to you for consideration, I sent you 'The Sorrows of Sophia.' You returned it with an almost savage criticism upon its utter unsuitability for publication in any form whatsoever.

Within two days I sent it back to you. You then wrote, accepting it with apparent avidity, and telling me that in 'Sophia' I had found myself, and that my touch had gained in firmness."

She saw him flush again.

"Strange!" he said. "It must have been that by some oversight Sophia was put back into her envelope, the first time, without being read at all."

"Ah!" she triumphantly replied. "I thought as much! Then there was another thing I wanted your advice upon"—she broke off—"but you're too busy—"

"Iona," he replied, "if I may call you so, I have nothing whatever to do. I had an interview with my chief this morning. He has given me what is vulgarly known as the push."

Thomasine flushed and started.

"Accept my sincere regrets," she began. She looked at him and saw that, instead of an extreme depression, a curious kind of chivalrous exhilaration shone from his face. "You were too go-ahead for them?" she ventured.

"Not too go-ahead, perhaps, but too—disinterested," he said. "The cause of my dismissal was the publication of a series of stories from the pen of a contributor in whose personality I had more faith than in her literary ability."

Her eyes grew round with admiration.

"It was noble of you," she said, "to risk your position for the sake of one who was nothing to you, and who probably wrote trash!"

"This morning," continued Monkman, "Cleveson came into my office with a sheaf of correspondence from readers of the *Mirror*, complaining of the series I have mentioned. He demanded an explanation of my conduct. Until this morning he had not noticed that those stories had been running in the magazine for several weeks. I gave him a truthful explanation—"

"You gave him a truthful explanation, and he gave you the push!" said

Thomasine. "It sounds rather like playing consequences," she added a bit ruefully.

Suddenly Marcus Monkman's face broke out into an unaccountable expression of ecstasy.

"He didn't know what he was doing in showing me the door," the young editor said joyously. "I happen to be a man with money behind me, and I am starting in a month or two, an opposition magazine, which will shatter *Nature's Mirror* into a thousand smithereens!"

Thomasine clapped her hands.

"Bravo, Mr. Editor!" she exclaimed.

"Already I have a list of my contributors mapped out in my head," he said. "A prominent feature of the magazine will be a series of tales in which Iona reveals a hitherto unsuspected vein of humor."

"But do you think Iona has a vein of humor?" Thomasine began.

"Iona has a fund of most audacious humor," he replied enthusiastically. "She has a well of it, from which, with a little judicious assistance from me, I hope to see her draw weekly buckets full of cheeriness and fun!"

A year later Thomasine came into the office of the editor of *Cupid's Confessions*. The editor looked up from his desk with a smile, and handed his wife a letter.

"Dear Mr. Editor," she read, "please let us have lots more of Iona's funny stories. They buck up all our family for the week."

Thomasine Monkman kissed her husband's head, which was all that she could conveniently embrace.

"You dear, clever old thing! I'm so fearfully glad!" she said.

---

#### TO ONE COMPLAINING OF TIME'S ADVANCES

Time has taken hostage from me surely

Of many things most glorious to my heart:

He took youth first; I sickened when I heard it—

My door shut by him—his swift feet depart!

Once you were young; why, then, not hold your tongue—

Say, is it nothing, once to have been young?

You'd have no need to pine in age's school

If you had seized him by the forelock, fool!

Time observes continually my going

And coming: always while my days exist

On every citadel his spearheads showing,

Bid me beware my long antagonist!

Bid me beware the swift, innumerable sally

At gates the moment open for a breath,

Continual assault of powerful armies

As ineluctable and sure as death.

Yet, Time must not defeat but come upon you,

A greater foe man put you still to rout—

When, one by one, the marching stars beginning,

Captain Eternity draws up, without!

Harry Kemp

# THE WORLD TO-DAY



A TYPICAL SCENE IN ANDORRA

## A Land of Dreams

*Andorra, the Tiniest Republic, Has No Army, No Navy, No Written Laws,  
No Lawyers, No Landlords, No Movies*

By Negley Farson

### ENCAMP, ANDORRA.



If you are weary of the daily grind of modern city life, if your feet are beginning to drag and you feel that just for a little while you would like to sit down by the side of the road—then come to Andorra.

Andorra is a republic, a little cluster of free valleys in the Pyrenees, about seventeen miles long by ten wide. It is a little country in a cup, for it is bounded on the north by the passes of France, on the south by those of Spain, and it is shut off east and west by sheer walls of brown rock from six thousand to ten thousand feet high.

Copyright, 1928, The New York Sun

There life is being lived very much as many of us have dreamed it should be. It isn't so much what Andorra has to offer that gives it its charm—it is what Andorra has not. Andorra, for instance, has no army or navy—it has no written laws. It has no railroads, no street cars, no lawyers, and no landlords. It has only one road. It is so small and remote that it has not even a moving picture theater. It has never seen Charlie Chaplin!

But it has flocks of red goats that roam the steep hills, thousands and thousands of fat woolly sheep, drowsy cows chewing their cuds beside swift-flowing streams, and Andorra has a president who is paid four dollars a year. He makes nothing out of it, he told me. And when I asked him what his official duties were, he said:

"Relations with foreign powers."

These relations are not so insignificant as you might think—as you will see from my interview with the president.

#### THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The peasant girl took me to him, walking with me along the dirt road through the little stone houses of Encamp. They were sturdy little chalets, built of unfinished brownstone, with the stable on the street floor and open haylofts under their scalelike slate roofs.

She led me past some women who were washing clothes in a hot sulphur stream, under a square portal exactly like a medieval gate—which it was—up a rickety flight of wooden steps and into a low-beamed whitewashed kitchen-living room, where Don Roc Palleres was even then engaged in the duties of state. He was signing a document for an old peasant lady, which he duly sealed with a huge metal stamp. Fortunately his son spoke a little French, as my Catalan was very bad—and that was the only language Don Roc knew.

"*Bonjour, M. le Président,*" I

bowed to Don Roc. "I come from a sister republic."

Don Roc bowed gravely, and we shook hands.

"Yes," he admitted, when I had asked him to elucidate upon the political relationship of Andorra with both France and Spain—"it is a bit complicated."

The situation was something like this: While everybody in Andorra speaks of Don Roc as the president, and while even I addressed him as such—he is not really a president. He is a *Sindic*. His real title is *Sindic Procurador General des les Valls d'Andorra*.

#### CAN'T BE A CITIZEN

And Andorra is not really an independent republic, it is semi-independent—under the dual protectorate of France and the Bishop of Urgel, in Spain. And both Spain and France are very jealous as far as their spheres of interest in Andorra are concerned. Each country has the right to appoint a *vigener* to Andorra, a sort of militia governor and judge of petty crime. And each country, alternating, has the right to appoint a civil judge of appeal.

Don Roc was a skinny little man, bald, blue-eyed, with a hooked nose, a preoccupied expression—and scrofula. He was dressed in hempen sandals, a black-sashed suit of shabby brown corduroys and a blue shirt without any collar. He also wore a frock coat. He was a peasant, but a dignified one, and whether his job was great or small he was on top of it. There were a lot of blank forms on the desk before him, which, his son told me, were passports. I asked for one as a souvenir.

Consternation fell on the kitchen-living room. Don Roc arose solemnly and beckoned his son into a corner. They held converse there together, while I gazed through the window at Andorra's watered fields and snow-capped mountains. Then both of them came back.



"My father regrets," said the son, rather red in the face, "that he cannot grant that request. You see, the bearer of that passport will be entitled to claim Andorra citizenship."

And Andorra citizenship is not so easy to obtain. If a stranger settles down in Andorra his family cannot be counted as Andorrans until the third generation.

#### THE OTHER SIDE OF IT

I lay on my back and looked up through the oak branches at the sky. Andorra! What luck to have found it—this tiny little country that had been tucked away in the Pyrenees since the days of Charlemagne! It was the freshest spot in all Europe. And yet there was "uncle" down there in the Hotel Paulet—always grouching away about Barcelona. Ah, that was a city, he said. Give him Barcelona—and life!

There wasn't the slightest doubt in uncle's mind but that any man was a fool to stay in Andorra if he could possibly get away from there. Andorra was a prison, in which he had to serve a life sentence.

Uncle was the handy man at the Hotel Paulet. He was the brother-in-law of the proprietor, and was always bitterly conscious of his ineligibility to vote. Only the head of the house may vote in Andorra. Uncle must have been at least forty-five, but he was the hands and feet, not the head, of the Hotel Paulet.

The Hotel Paulet never receives visitors in winter, and in consequence has no heating whatever. We ate with our overcoats on in an icy dining room,

and tried to heat ourselves with red wine. But immediately that was over we raced down for the kitchen stove, around which "the family" lived.

#### THE FAMILY HEARTH

The proprietor, his fat wife, their soft-eyed daughter—and uncle. Uncle was a cynic. When we courteously praised the food—uncle coughed. When he carried up the hot sulphur water each night for my bath he had a sarcastic remark with each bucket. The sulphur water was boiling hot and came from a natural pool. Very convenient, except that the pool was a considerable walk down the hill from the hotel. Uncle had to make this trip about ten times a night—with two buckets.

Poor uncle! No wonder we could not see eye to eye. We had come up to Andorra expecting dirt and discomfort. Instead we had discovered a congenial hotel and the most delightful picnic park in all Europe—for that is what Andorra is. We never wore hats; we ate our lunch beside a new stream before a new vista of snowy mountains each day. We sprawled in the warm sun.

But uncle—carrying up our buckets of bath water at night—was faced with the realities of Andorra life. He would have to keep on doing this. For in Andorra things do not change. The six thousand Andorrans were not pioneers who could push on to a new country beyond. They were peasants on land which had reached its maximum development long before they were born.

---

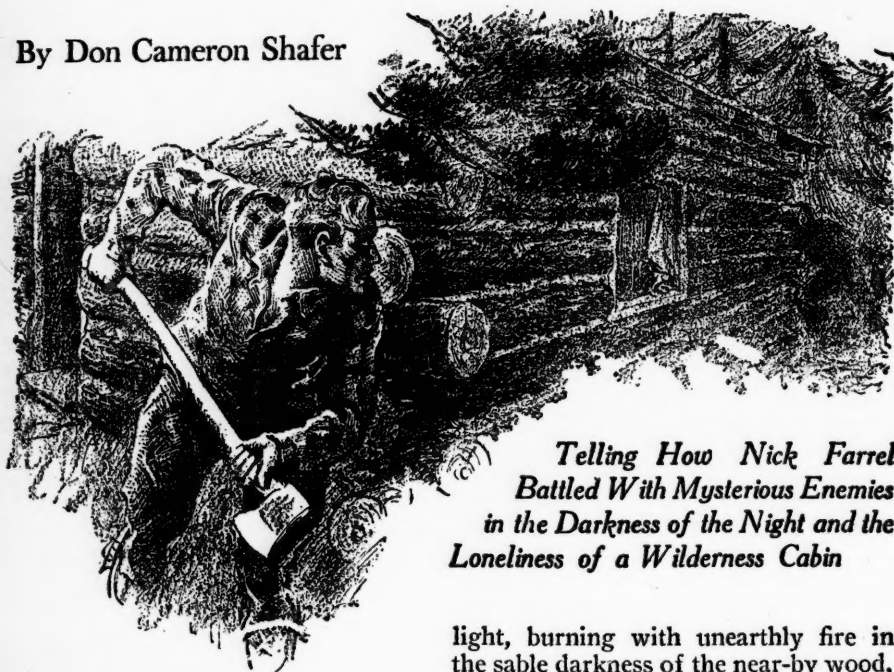
#### BELLEAU WOOD

A THIN young forest on a French hill's crest—  
A peaceful woodland sloping toward the west  
And north, where row on row, white crosses keep  
Watch on the curving greensward's long bright sweep;  
And brilliant on the background of dark trees,  
Old Glory fluttering in the soft south breeze.

*Lena Whittaker Blakeney*

# Black Shadow

By Don Cameron Shafer



*Telling How Nick Farrel  
Battled With Mysterious Enemies  
in the Darkness of the Night and the  
Loneliness of a Wilderness Cabin*



SEE if you can take a hint!"

muttered Nick Farrel, as the roar of his heavy rifle tore through the dark spruce forest like a tall tree crashing down upon hard ice before a gale of wind.

"I'll give you to understand that I don't care for your kind of company!"

Another flash of livid flame lit up the night-veiled landscape for one brief instant, bringing out in sharp relief the straight gray boles of crowding trees beyond a little clearing—and nothing more. Another crashing rifle shot, roaring like a salvo in the tense silence of the wilderness, beat against the high rock cliff across the near-by river, to come booming back into the smothering arms of the dense spruces.

"I'll stop your haunting this place if I have to do it with lead!"

Two small globes of pale greenish

light, burning with unearthly fire in the sable darkness of the near-by wood, were instantly extinguished—gone as mysteriously as they had come.

For a moment the angry youth stood in threatening defiance before his little wilderness cabin, ready to shoot again if he got a chance, staring out into the impenetrable darkness with searching, anxious eyes. Out there in the shadowy night, under the dark foliage of the trees, a black shadow moved among many shadows; but his eyes could not see it.

The noisy gun had hushed every small voice of the night—a melancholy cricket chirp beneath the cabin wall, the quavering wail of two little owls in a dead tree, the hysterical laughter of a loon upon the river. It had stopped every rustling footstep, great and small, upon the leaf-strewn forest floor.

"This is getting on my nerves," confessed the youth, half aloud, "or I wouldn't be wasting ammunition on

chance shots in the dark!"

Nick turned back into the cabin. He was not exactly afraid, even though he closed the door rather hurriedly behind him and barred it securely, top and bottom.

"Nothing whatever to be scared about," he muttered, talking to himself, after the manner of those long alone in the big woods; "but I can *feel* that something isn't just right around here!"

It was an unexplainable something, as such things come to hidden senses, an undeniable premonition of threatening danger and disaster, he knew not what. Nick was a mere boy, hardly twenty, with all the timidity of youth and inexperience and the easily begotten fears of a lonely trapper's life in the far northern wilderness. He was too young for the many hardships and constant dangers of such an adventurous life, and yet he had already seen two seasons in the big woods with old Billy McDowell, one of the most successful trappers that ever scent-baited a fox set.

Old Billy had not survived his last prolonged spree of the summer before, when he spent his hard-won fur money so quickly and so unwisely. He had left Nick Farrel heir to his trapping territory, and the young man's title was recognized by the unwritten law of all the northern trappers. This was Nick's first season alone, and so far he had done remarkably well.

Old Billy's cabin was a stanch little log house of a single room, with a wide fireplace. There was but one window, of good size, covered with oiled muslin. The simple furniture had been made by the old man's skillful hands, with no other tools than an ax, a buck-saw, a one-inch auger, and a pocket-knife. A bunk with woolen blankets, a stool, a bench, a table, a few wall shelves—that was the whole equipment; and the little shack was a comfortable and convenient home, upon a well-chosen site, near a good spring,

and beside the river. By canoe and portage Nick had brought in plenty of substantial provisions, and his rifle could be depended upon to keep him in fresh meat. In addition to this, he could have a fish whenever he felt so inclined, for there was a fyke net set in the river.

"Old Billy would laugh at me," said Nick, "for being so cowardly!"

But this obvious and acknowledged fact did not deter him from what he was about to do. Against the rear wall of the cabin stood a few rough boards, split from spruce logs with ax and wedge. Nick got these out and made a strong wooden shutter to close the window from the inside, fastening it securely in place by boring slanting holes in the logs about the window frame and driving in stout wooden pegs.

"Foolishness, of course, but I'll sleep better for it," he admitted frankly. "I can't stay awake to watch, night after night, and run traps the next day!"

## II

Its ears stung by the sharp report of the rifle fired at close range, its eyes blinded by the flash of burning powder, the standing bear dropped to all fours just as a steel-jacketed bullet tore over its black head between its cocked ears. It flattened instantly to the ground, whimpering a little, like a dog that knows it is about to be whipped. Though safely hidden by concealing shadows even blacker than its own jet coat, it covered its head with protecting forepaws.

This was the monster bear of fiction and fable, a formidable and fear-inspiring beast, standing nearly six feet when erect like a man, and weighing more than three hundred pounds; and yet it was one of the most timid and harmless of all forest creatures, far more apt to run than to fight, and mischievous and playful rather than dangerous. It did not understand that

Nick was a dangerous enemy, made desperate by half believed folk lore and imaginative fears, nor did it suspect that death had just whistled over its black head.

Not until the cabin was dark, and all was quiet again, did the bear move slowly and noiselessly away, rumbling in its shaggy throat, its usual jovial spirit and happy disposition soured for the moment.

"Never heard of such a thing before in all my life!" soliloquized Nick, within the security of his barricaded cabin. "Imagine a black bear—a beast that's usually scared to death of a man—hanging around here night after night, as if it expected me to adopt it!"

For more than a week this young bear had visited Nick's shack nearly every night. It was lonely, far from its own kind, and it hungered for company and amusement. The cabin was an interesting place to an animal so curious and playful; and it was also attracted by the bits of garbage it was able to salvage from the refuse dump. Despite all Nick's fears and precautions, it had no thought of doing him any harm.

"Go ahead now and have your fun," said Nick, as he wrapped himself in his blankets, "while I enjoy a good sleep for the first time in a week!"

Like most frontier boys, young Farrel had been brought up on bear stories. All the men he knew, white or red, destroyed every bear they could, at any time of the year—even the little cubs—and excused this wanton killing by insisting that all bears are treacherous and dangerous. For all this fear of the black rover of the woods, Nick was forced to admit that he never had known a single authentic instance where a common bear had hurt any one.

The many bear cubs he had seen about trappers' cabins, frontier villages, and trading posts had been just as friendly and playful as so many

dogs. The few wild bears he had seen were as timid and wary as any deer, carefully avoiding settlements, and quick to get away from man; and yet somehow the very thought of bears made his flesh creep and his hair bristle.

Not that he was afraid of any bear in the broad light of day, with a good rifle in his hands; but an ursine visitor prowling around his cabin every night, when he was all alone in the big woods, was rather more than he could stand. It got on his nerves after a few nights, even though he had never seen the animal—no more than a black shadow among so many shadows of the night; but he had found by day innumerable tracks and signs sufficient to identify his nocturnal persecutor. The bear kept well hidden by day, although Nick rightly guessed that more than once it had followed him over his trap lines at a safe and respectful distance.

"If I come back here next year," said Nick drowsily, "I shall bring a couple of good bear traps, even if they are heavy!"

Driven away from the cabin by the thundering rifle, the bear wandered down toward the near-by river. It followed the well-worn pathway from the cabin through the spruces down to the landing where the big canoe was hauled out. From time to time, as it shuffled along the path, it dropped a wet black nose close to the hard-packed earth and drew in a deep, resonant breath, drinking in the strong man scent from the invisible tracks left by Nick when he passed that way in the evening.

Then, recovering its happy-go-lucky spirits, the beast stopped to play with a bit of fluffy rabbit skin, cuffing its toy about. It rolled with grunting comfort in the soft earth where a pail of dishwater had been thrown. Then, going on, it caught the appetizing odor of fresh fish.

Nick had pulled the fyke net when he came home. Sorting out what fish



he wanted for breakfast, he had left the rest to freeze in the cold night air, so as to preserve them for future use. Warned by previous experiences with the night prowler, he had been very careful to hang his store high in a convenient tree.

The bear was keenly disappointed when he found that it could not reach the fish from the ground. It tried to get at them from the tree trunk, reaching far out, but could not touch them. It made a third attempt by climbing out on the limb, but they hung down too far, and the animal lacked sufficient intelligence to haul them up on the cord.

For a long time it sat on the ground, staring up at the coveted meal, as if in deep meditation. Hunger sharpens the wits. An old stump was handy by—the bear tore it loose with the strength of a giant and rolled it beneath the fish. Standing erect on the stump, balancing like an acrobat, the bear reached them and pulled them down.

### III

"YOU'RE a bigger thief than Injun Dogface!" exclaimed Nick in disgust, when he discovered, shortly after daylight next morning, what had happened to his fish. "I don't doubt for a minute that you'd be just as much of a killer, too, if you had half a chance!"

To appreciate what a slander and insult this was, even to a marauding bear, one had to know Dogface.

Trap robber, fur thief, murderer, and fugitive from justice, Dogface was a hunted man roaming somewhere in that northern wilderness. There was too much bad Indian in him to do any work, and too much bad white in him to obey any law; and he thought himself too clever to be caught.

Two years before this Nick had come upon the thief robbing his traps at a beaver dam. He hadn't the heart to shoot him, as the rascal so richly

deserved; neither could he afford to take the time and risk of delivering the treacherous half-breed to the nearest post, many miles away, as there was no reward, at that time, for his capture. So he did the next best thing—he gave the miserable thief the licking of his life. Dogface would have killed, then, had not Nick taken the precaution to break the man's gun against a tree.

Dogface was a "woods Indian"—a general and highly uncomplimentary term applied to all disreputable redskins and half-breeds who roam more or less independently through the wilderness, not affiliated with any recognized tribe. He was swart and grimy, dark-visaged, strangely like a dog—a mongrel dog, surly and vicious—and yet one of the cleverest woodsmen that ever lived.

He had to be clever, for robbing traps is a dangerous business. He had to be weasel sly, to evade the Mounties for nearly two years. He was a renegade without a home, without a friend, without even a companion, except when he could force his welcome upon some Indian hunter of his kind. There was a price on his head, and in every town, on every well-traveled trail, the law waited, relentless and all powerful—the law with a rope for his neck!

Always Dogface had hunted or stolen his living. His old rifle kept him supplied with food, and he robbed trap lines and fur caches, and even the cabins of remote trappers, for supplies and for fur to barter with other roaming Indians for ammunition and a few necessities. He had killed old Pappy Cooke in a fight that started over nothing, as such tragedies so often do.

The surly Indian had come to Cooke's cabin demanding food. The old man knew him to be a thief, and thought he had better give the fellow something to eat, rather than have him stealing it after dark. They quarreled over Cooke's pets. Pappy was a great man for pets. Always his cabin and

his dooryard were filled with cages and with animals chained to the trees. The quarrel started over a young wolverine, as they debated its mighty courage and phenomenal strength.

At Dogface's heels was a mongrel cur, more than half Airedale, and to settle the dispute they matched the dog against the wolverine. In the struggle to save his "face" and his dog, as the fighting animals rolled over the dooryard, the Indian clubbed a favorite bear cub which happened to be in his way; and old Pappy, resenting this, promptly knocked him down. In a second Dogface was up again with a knife in his red fist, and in another second the knife was red, too. He would have killed Cooke's old Chipewa woman also, to cover the first crime, but she retreated to the cabin and grabbed a pail of boiling water from the stove.

The news of the killing traveled quickly over the land, as news will in a frontier country, and Private O'Connor, new to the service and to the ways of bad Indians, came down to investigate. He met Dogface on the Rock Ridge Carry, and arrested him—cringing, grinning, lying, giving himself up; but a few minutes later the half-breed caught the unsuspecting officer off his guard, and went on, leaving another dead man behind him.

From that hour no white man had seen the outlaw's evil face. Relentless as hungry wolves, the Mounties followed his trail—when they could find it; but those who hunt a wild and cunning woods Indian in the immeasurable forests of northern Canada have their work cut out for them. No animal, no savage, no man, was more skillful in the woods, more enduring, more familiar with hardship, famine, and bitter weather.

Even with the handsome reward offered for the murderer, dead or alive, by the Dominion government, and with every hunter and trapper ready to collect the money with a rifle bullet

at sight, the wily half-breed had not been caught. It was generally agreed that Dogface had gone to the wildest remnant of his savage people, the scattered bands of woods Indians living far to the north and out of touch with Canadian posts.

So, when Nick jokingly likened this mischievous bear to Dogface, it was the greatest insult he could think of at the moment.

"You keep on pestering me, brother of Dogface," he promised, "and I'll make a trap for you!"

Nick might be a little timid about bears in the dark, but he wasn't in the least afraid of them in daylight. He spent an hour trying to find this one without success. There was as yet no snow, and therefore tracking was entirely out of the question. Hunting a lone bear in the boundless forest, without dogs, was next to impossible. He gave it up, hoping that the animal would get tired of snooping around and go away; but that very night it was back again.

Shortly after Nick got to sleep, after a hard day with his traps, he was awakened by an unearthly clamor outside.

*Clink, clank, clang, clang, clang—*

"What in the world is all that?" he said, jumping up.

Then he laughed; but soon he was cursing heartily, as the noise continued without abatement. In his hurry to get a belated supper Nick had left his galvanized water pail on a bench outside the door. The bear had discovered the pail, and was playing with it—having a lot of noisy fun, cuffing it around, tossing it up into the air, thoroughly enjoying the terrible racket.

It was impossible for Nick to sleep. He grabbed his rifle and slipped outside, standing close by the half opened door; but it was a very dark night, and he couldn't see a thing ten feet away, although he could hear the old pail rattling and clanging over the stones

somewhere out beyond his range of vision. In desperation, he fired his rifle in the general direction of the sound. The noise ceased, but it began again within the minute he was back indoors.

"Lordy!" groaned Nick. "What a pest! I've got to do something to get rid of that bear!"

Because of this disturbance he overslept and was late in getting breakfast. His temper was not of the best when he went outdoors to get a slice of moose meat — only to find the meat rack empty.

"You dog-faced thief and disturber of the peace! Now I'll take the day off and build that trap," he growled, thoroughly angry. "I can't afford to support a lazy, good-for-nothing bear!"

The rack had been torn down, and what meat the bear could not eat it had carried away and hidden in the woods. Nick found his iron pail battered into a shapeless mass.

Going back to the cabin, the young man got his double-bitted ax and touched up the blades to a keen edge with a small file. Selecting a favorable location for his trap in the woods, not far from the cabin, he dropped a big spruce just where he wanted it, and proceeded to cut off two heavy logs. The first log was rolled into a shallow depression in the ground, and almost covered with earth and leaves, until only the upper edge was visible. Nick drove heavy stakes along one side of this log, and rolled the second log up on top of it, holding it in place with additional stakes driven securely into the ground. The top log was about twice as long as the under log, and therefore much heavier.

Next he cut the largest limbs and the remainder of the tree into suitable lengths to build a small pen immediately behind the two logs. This he weighted down with heavy rocks, and placed inside some fish for bait. Then he pried up one end of the top log al-

most three feet, and held it in place with a block of stones until he could make and set the heavy trigger. When thus completed, the trap was a formidable deadfall, capable of crushing the life out of any bear unfortunate enough to step between the two logs to reach the bait in the pen.

"Come back to-night," chuckled Nick, when his trap was finished and carefully set, "and help yourself to a light lunch!"

#### IV

THAT night Nick slept soundly, after a hard day's work, and therefore heard nothing of his nocturnal visitor's activities.

"I'll bet I've got the old rascal!"

The fact that he had not been disturbed during the night made it seem almost certain. After a hasty breakfast he went out to look, just as soon as it was light, taking his rifle and his largest skinning knife, which was extra sharp; but when he approached the deadfall, confident of success, he was surprised to find that the trap had been completely destroyed.

"You foxy old devil!" he exclaimed. "All my hard work for nothing! Well, I'll get you yet!"

In the soft forest soil Nick saw the record of the night's work. The bear had approached the bait from the pen side, probably more by accident than by any knowledge or design. Instead of walking around the logs to get to the bait, he had demolished the pen, hauling away the rocks, tossing aside the small logs, and ripping out the stakes. In doing so he had sprung the trigger, dropping the fall, which, in descending, had just missed the bear's head, giving him a bad bump over the right ear.

In raging fury the beast had attacked the thing that hurt him. His powerful forepaws, anger-driven, had scattered the sticks and stones, and with giant strength he had heaved the heavy logs over the bank and sent them

hurtling down into the racing waters of the river below.

"Some day I'll be looking at you over my rifle sights," said Nick, "and then—"

He did not finish this sentence. Dark it was, under a thick canopy of evergreens hiding the early morning sun, and yet, a little distance farther on in the dark wood, he saw a black shadow moving. The rifle leaped to his shoulder and hesitated there. In that poor light he could not be sure whether this tall, upright shadow was a man or a standing bear; and the unwritten law of the big woods forbade him to shoot until he was absolutely certain. Even in that remote wilderness there was a chance, if only one in a hundred, that the black silhouette might be that of a man.

Even as Nick hesitated, it melted with other shadows and was gone. He advanced, quickly, noiselessly, his rifle ready, to the spot, and saw nothing. As if to confuse and confound him more, there in the soft brown needles beneath the trees was the faint and indistinct impression of a large track; but whether it had been made by the hind foot of a bear, so much like a man's, or by the moccasined tread of an Indian, he could not tell.

"Hello!" he called out into the silent wood. "Hello!"

A jay mocked him, a squirrel set up a quarrelsome answer, but no human voice came floating back to his ears.

"Answer me, or I'll shoot!" he roared in angry voice.

It was an empty threat, designed to bring some one out of hiding—there was nothing to shoot at!

"Mighty lucky for you, Bruno, that it wasn't just a bit lighter!"

A long line of traps lay before him—a great many sets for marten, fox, and mink, and a few for beaver, zig-zagging here and there ahead of him, up this stream and down that, along a rocky ledge and over a ridge, seem-

ingly haphazard, going nowhere, but always and ever turning in a huge circle so as to bring him home again when the day was done.

All the way along, as he inspected his traps, resetting, rebaiting, skinning his catch, he thought about the menace of the bear.

"I've got to get that fellow," he told himself, studying ways and means of accomplishing it. "A regular nuisance! Any bear as cunning as that is dangerous."

This particular specimen, possessing a rather unusual knowledge of man's ways, was more of a nuisance than Nick guessed at the time. When he returned home that evening, it was to find the door of his cabin swinging wide open and the interior a scrambled mess.

"God in the brush!" he exclaimed. "This is too much!"

The cabin floor was white with spilled flour and marked all over with bear tracks. All about were the mischief and destruction that the prowler had wrought. The homemade furniture was overturned, and some of it was broken. All the provision containers were opened, and what had not been eaten was scattered on the floor. Then the big animal clown had amused himself by playing with the empty tins; and there was evidence that, tired of this at last, he had deliberately taken a nap in Nick's bunk.

"I'll have your black hide to pay for this!" roared the indignant trapper. "Come a bit of snow, and I'll get your scalp if I have to follow you to the Rocky Mountains!"

Having found a little relief for his feelings in wild threats of vengeance, Nick set about to salvage what he could of his precious supplies.

"Now I can't winter here as I planned," he growled in disgust and regret. "I'll have to go out with the first good snow, and lose a season's work!"

He was unable to account for this



particular bear's strange behavior, for it was unlike that of any bear Nick ever had heard about. True enough, trappers' cabins had been broken into before by bears, but not when the owners were occupying them and the human scent was so fresh and strong. This bear was sly and cautious, but not wild or afraid of men. It seemed to be determined, to linger there specially to bedevil Nick Farrel.

"I'll sell your black pelt to pay for this!" promised the angry youth. "I'll eat your heart fried in your own grease!"

## V

THE next day Nick was doubly careful to see that everything was inside the cabin, and the door securely fastened, before he went away. All that day, as he looked after his traps, he kept a watchful eye alert for the black shadow of the bear, his heavy rifle ready to shoot; but he didn't see even a black shadow moving.

"I'll have to think up some other kind of a trap," he told himself. "That bear is educated."

He considered a pitfall, but he lacked adequate tools to dig a pit sufficiently large and deep. He thought of a snare, but he had no rope heavy enough to hold a bear. Still, some kind of a trap must be built, for all through the day, as he made the round of his traps, he had a feeling, an unexplainable "hunch," that he was being followed.

"That damned bear is getting on my nerves!" he exclaimed aloud, to steady himself with the sound of his own voice. "Well, I'm not afraid of any bear in the world with this rifle in my hands!"

Nevertheless, he walked a little faster than usual through the woods, always listening, his head jerking back over his shoulder every few steps. When he skinned a mink, he stood with his back to a big rock for additional protection, nervously alert, his rifle

cocked and ready beside him.

"Scared of a bear!" he said scornfully, accusing himself. "My insides must be turning to a bright yellow jelly!"

Again and again he told himself that no bear could harm him while he held in his hand a rifle that would stop a moose. Laughing at the absurdity of his nervous apprehension, whipping fear behind him, he went on, defying all bears great or small.

"There isn't any bear within miles of me," he assured his inner self. "If there was, it couldn't do me any harm if it wanted to."

And yet, when close to the cabin, coming up the well-worn but narrow trail through heavy young spruces in the clear, cold starlight of early evening, he knew that the beast was there. He could see nothing, he heard nothing, but his keen young nostrils, almost as efficient as the nose of a dog, were full of the heavy animal odor of live bear.

He leaped forward, dashing for the safety of the near-by cabin, his flesh quivering and his heart jumping.

"If I don't get that damned bear," he gasped, bracing himself against the inside of the closed door, "it will get me!"

The next morning, his courage returning with the sun, Nick did not go out to inspect his traps. He went bear hunting instead. All his woodcraft, all his skill and cunning were utilized to the utmost to find his elusive enemy. He found plenty of bear "sign" in favorable places, but there was no way of tracking the beast without snow.

"It would be just my luck to have the black devil hole up for the winter with the first snow, and cheat me out of my revenge!"

Late in the afternoon, hungry and tired, Nick was forced to return home without the black skin over his shoulder.

"All right, all right!" he declared,

addressing the mysterious animal. "I give up hunting, but to-night I'll play a little joke on you, old fellow!"

Nick grinned to himself to think of the clever scheme that had occurred to him. There was just about enough daylight left for him to accomplish what he had in mind.

Each night, evidently, the bear traveled the well-worn pathway from the cabin door to the river. Nick got an ax and cut some strong stakes. With his knife and pieces of string he constructed a rest for his rifle, close beside the trail, but well hidden among the spruce branches. He placed the heavy rifle so that the barrel lay level, pointed directly at the trail. Then he attached a cord to the trigger, and ran it across the trail, in point-blank range of the deadly rifle.

"You walk here to-night," grinned Nick, as he made certain that the rifle was loaded, cocked, and ready, "and for once you'll have something in your belly that you didn't steal!"

If the bear touched the string across the narrow pathway it was as good as dead. The concealed rifle, at such close range, could hardly miss.

"About to-morrow noon," chuckled Nick, "I'll be eating bear steak!"

## VI

NICK awakened with a start in the darkened cabin, to hear stealthy, guarded footsteps outside. There was no more than the faintest *swish, swish* of soft-soled feet moving, and the dulllest vibration of a heavy step or two before the door.

Instinctively he reached out of the bunk for his rifle, but it was not there. This puzzled him for a second, until he remembered that the weapon was out in the woods, set as a spring gun for the bear.

"If he'll just take a little stroll down that path to the river," thought Nick, "maybe I can get a little rest!"

He lay there on the bunk, wide-eyed in the dark, listening to the stealthy

footsteps, waiting eagerly for the roar of the rifles. Again a qualm of night-born fear gripped him, despite his knowledge that the cabin was secure with door and window heavily barred. There was hardly a chance that any bear could get in even if so minded.

For a time all was still again, except for the faint hiss of a sap-wet log end smoldering in the fireplace, and the almost indistinguishable murmur of moving water in the near-by river. Then Nick saw the door move ever so slightly, as if a heavy body was pressing its weight against the wood. The bars creaked a little, and the tiny crack of light between the top of the door and the frame, where the night sky was plainly visible, widened as the boards bent slowly inward.

Noiselessly Nick rolled out of bed, stepped quickly across the room in his bare feet, and picked up the ax, with his muscles set to swing it if the bars gave way. Before his straining eyes the door moved slowly back into place, and all was deathly still outside. He stood there, the ax in his hands, his heart pounding, not free from his haunting fear and yet ready to fight for his life.

Then, behind him, he heard the faint sound of old cloth slowly tearing, and he knew that his midnight intruder was at the window. Not until the oiled muslin was torn away would it be revealed that the opening was protected by a heavy wooden shutter. Nick stepped quickly forward, with his ax ready to strike if the shutter came crashing in and a black head appeared in the frame; for he knew the power behind those mighty bear forepaws.

Something very like a sharp claw rasped along the edge of the shutter.

"Try and break it!" thought Nick grimly, setting his teeth, steeling his muscles, and marshaling all his courage. "I'll give you the ax!"

For the next few seconds, hearing nothing, he once more gave way to fear. He was young, and more or less

inexperienced, for this was his first season alone in the wilderness. His limbs shook and his very vitals quivered with nervous fright, although he knew he was safe enough within the stout cabin, and with a heavy ax in his strong hands.

"Me scared!" The ridiculousness of the situation flashed through his mind. "Scared of a bear—a common, cowardly black bear!"

He knew that black bears are not dangerous, except when wounded. Indian hunters and trappers do not hesitate to attack them with the crudest of weapons—with muzzle-loading trade guns, with axes and knives. No real woodsman, for all his bear stories, was ever afraid of bears. It flashed through Nick's mind that his own father had once got up in the night and driven a bear away from his beehives with nothing but a broom. The knowledge shamed him. His inner self resented his own timidity. As rage mounted, fear vanished and courage returned in full strength.

"Scaring me half to death!" he told himself. "Not much of a bear, either!"

By the tracks that he had seen Nick knew that this bear was not much larger than himself. With the ax in his hands he was more than a match for it; and youth, once aroused, knows no fear.

"If he's looking for me," the trapper declared, "he won't have to look long!"

With set teeth and hardened muscles he stepped noiselessly to the door and opened it as quietly as possible. Peering out, he saw nothing.

For a moment he stood there in the doorway, ready to strike hard and sure with the keen-bladed ax, if the black shadow of the bear revealed itself. It was dark, and yet there was enough light for him to use the ax effectively at close range, if he got a chance. Objects were discernible in shadowy outline for a little distance in any direction.

Nick went a step or two farther, listening, peering anxiously this way and that, hearing nothing, seeing nothing. Then, standing there before the door, listening carefully, he heard a faint noise on the window side of the cabin, to the right.

"Oh, there you are!" he muttered grimly.

He stepped noiselessly forward in his bare feet, unconscious of the frost-covered ground, and peered around the interlocked log ends of the cabin corner—just in time to see a black, up-standing shadow move quickly around the opposite corner.

"One swing at your black head is all I ask!" he told himself bravely.

Nick had stood all that he could stand. He knew that he must end this business once and for all, regardless of consequences. He slipped along close to the cabin wall until he could peep around the next corner, but he saw nothing.

"Playing hide and seek, eh?" he growled.

Suddenly the night resounded with the hoarse squall of a wounded and infuriated bear.

"Lordy!" gasped Nick aloud, almost dropping his ax.

The bear's angry cry was almost instantly followed by a scream of terror such as Nick had never heard before, and by the resounding thud of some weighty thing striking heavily upon the hard ground.

Nick backed quickly into the angle of the protecting log ends, the ax swinging wildly before him. Terrified, breathless, he stared out into the shadowy dark, seeing nothing.

## VII

For a few seconds the youth crouched there, terror-stricken, but ready to fight for his life, while the darkness pressed down upon him like a smothering sable cloak. His newly found courage had left him almost as suddenly as it came.

Then to his strained ears there came the welcome report of his own rifle.

"There goes the spring gun!" he said, with a sigh of relief.

The familiar voice of his gun gave him strength to run around the cabin and dash through the open door, which he slammed behind him. For a long time he stood there, leaning against the door, gripping his ax, breathing hard, and trembling in every quivering muscle. Then the smoldering log end on the fire burned up with a little yellow flame and faintly lighted the interior.

"Something mighty funny about all this," he muttered, frankly puzzled.

He held his breath to listen better. All was still outdoors. With the blade of his ax he knocked out a chink between the logs; but he could see nothing save the ragged silhouette of the tree tops against the starry night sky.

"Black bears," he told himself, "are the most timid animals for their size in the world."

Correct as it might be, this statement failed to reassure him when he remembered that horrible scream.

"A rabbit squalls just like that when it's hurt."

But, with the words, he knew that the quavering, high-pitched voice raised in mortal agony in the outer darkness had not come from any rabbit.

"It—it was some man out there!" he concluded.

If a man was out there, and had been hurt by the bear, it was Nick's duty to help. He lit a candle at the fire, and loosened the big skinning knife in its sheath as he buckled on his belt. Picking up the gleaming ax, he boldly unbarred and opened the door to the black curtain of night that had hidden the details of this mysterious tragedy from his sight.

Holding the candle above his head, so that it would not blind his own vision, and thus expose him to danger, he peered out into the dooryard. There

before him, in the grotesque posture of sudden death, lay the inert figure of a man.

"Lordy!" exclaimed Nick, all but dropping the candle. "A dead man!"

Overcoming a sudden impulse to duck back into the cabin, he looked anxiously around within the narrow circle of candlelight to find an explanation for the man's sudden death.

"It wasn't a bear prowling around here at all," he whispered hoarsely. "It was a man—trying to break into the cabin!"

The candle glittered and ran hot grease upon his cold fingers, but he hardly felt it. His hand shook until the yellow light wavered fantastically upon the distant trees, and great blotches of moving shadow writhed and twisted in a weird dance over the white frost covering the frozen earth; but he steadied himself and stepped forward to look closer, holding the candle lower. He saw an old lumberman's jacket, a greasy fur cap, moccasined feet—

"Dogface!" he cried.

Unquestionably it was the killer—killed. The outlaw had been trying to get into Nick's cabin; but he was dead, his evil head doubled under his falling body, and an outstretched fist still clutching a bloody knife.

"That knife," whispered Nick, "was for me!"

The hunter and trapper instinct prompted him to look at the frost-covered ground for a solution of this mystery. The entire clearing was white with frost particles, like a delicate film of new snow, which would vanish with the first touch of the sun; and on this spotless page was written the entire story for Nick to read with all a woodsman's skill.

"Bruno, you saved my life," he said with an audible sigh; "and then you walked right down into the spring gun!"

As he read on that white sheet just what had happened, he felt suddenly



ashamed of his cowardly trap, as if it had done a friend to death.

Dogface, a hunted thing, had come out of the woods from his retreat, knowing that trappers' cabins are seldom locked, and that the windows are not likely to be protected. He was out of ammunition, and therefore hungry and desperate, knowing that every hunter or trapper would shoot him at sight. The tracks showed that the crafty killer, finding Nick's door bolted, had gone around to the window. Finding that securely barred, he was apparently about to go away, to await a more favorable opportunity, when he heard Nick come out to look for the bear. Then, desperate enough for anything, the Indian had hurried around the cabin, to get behind Nick and use his knife. He saw a black shadow standing before him, upright like a man—he leaped forward and struck a murderous blow.

There in the white frost were the marks where the bear had stood—the tracks of the leaping man, striking in the dark—a drop or two of blood from a superficial wound. Nick judged that the keen-eared beast had heard the man in time to turn and throw up a guarding forearm. Roaring with the pain of a glancing cut, it had seized the man in one claw and then struck with the other. Dogface's neck was broken.

"That bear undoubtedly saved my life," sighed Nick; "and to think that I killed him with a cowardly spring gun!"

He went back into the cabin and built up a good fire. Then he dressed and sat down, quite unstrung, to wait for daylight.

"I'll pack up my traps and take the outlaw's body out," he decided. "The reward is worth more than any fur I could get in the few weeks that I could stay here without provisions."

Just as soon as it was light, Nick hurried down the pathway to get his rifle, still sad to think that the animal that had saved his life had fallen an

unsuspecting victim of his unsportsmanlike trap. Nevertheless he was cautious, well knowing that however inoffensive and timid a black bear may be when uninjured, it is a dangerous foe when wounded; and he was not certain that the rifle had killed.

With the ax ready in his right hand, he circled and came up to the set from one side. The rifle lay some distance away, half buried in the brown spruce needles. The stakes had been torn up, the cord broken; but there was no black body stiffened in death.

"The son of a gun!" exclaimed Nick. "If he didn't smash the trap!"

Coming closer, making sure there was no wounded bear in the immediate vicinity, he could see by the tracks in the frost that the running bear, dripping blood from a slight wound in the left forearm, had not come down the path, but had cut across straight through the trees. Mad with fear and pain, it had collided with the gun support in the darkness. At first Nick thought that the wounded beast had destroyed this man-made thing in the desperate fury of its rage; but, looking closely, he saw the reason.

Upon one of the broken stakes, which he had driven firmly into the frozen ground to support the rifle, there was a fragment of a leather strap. Nick picked it up, to recognize it instantly for what it was.

"A runaway tame bear!" he cried.

Unmistakably he held in his hand an old leather collar, which had caught upon one of the stakes and had been broken in the bear's struggle to get loose. Upon it was riveted a brass plate, on which was roughly scratched:

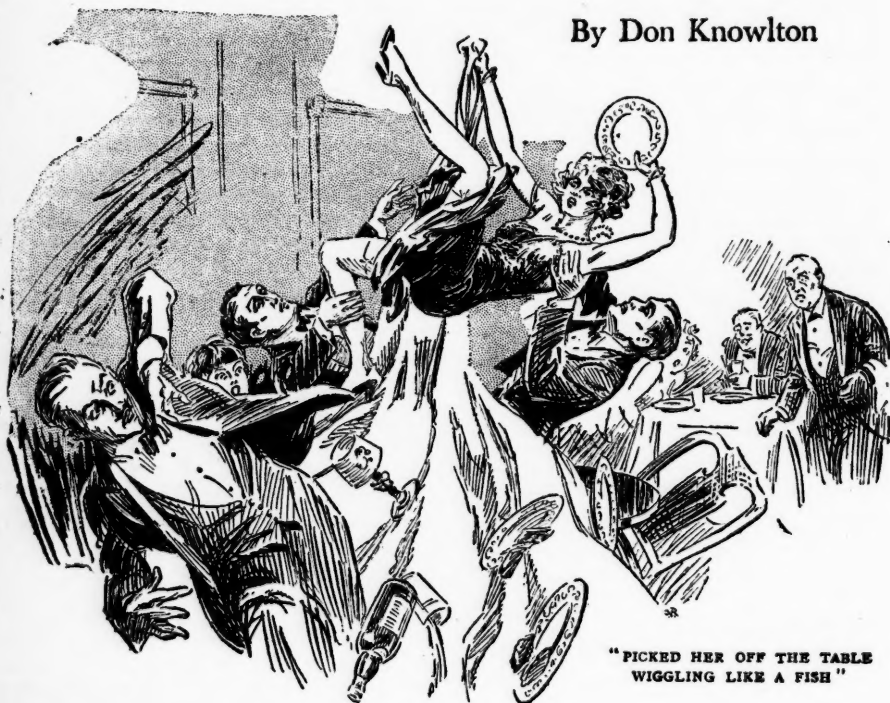
SIMON COOKE, GREEN LAKE

"No wonder that bear was so determined to be friendly and companionable, and not the least bit afraid of me!" cried Nick. "One of old Simon's pets, and it revenged its master! Bruno, you sure did me a good turn, and I'm glad you got away!"

# Cave Man

*A Story Which Shows That You Cannot Always Tell Just How a Highly Modern Woman Will React to an Outburst of Primitive Masculinity*

By Don Knowlton



"PICKED HER OFF THE TABLE  
WIGGLING LIKE A FISH"

**F**ROM the way Doherty walked into the club, I knew that something was the matter. He is far from being a bashful man. In fact, he usually makes something of a splash—with a new tie, or a fancy cane, or just with that certain air of his; but to-day he ducked through the lounge with his hat and coat still on, straight toward the locker room. Sills ran into him; otherwise we might not have known. The encounter knocked Doherty's hat off. Sills yelled, grabbed Doherty by the shoulders, and in cavalier fashion

shoved him back into the lounge.

"Look at that!" cried Sills.

A whopper, Sills is. Doherty stood there in his grasp, half laughing, half sulking; and then we saw it.

Doherty's left eye was black. It was the blackest black eye I have ever seen. The patch was neither large nor splotchy; it was a neat job—just a jet black trim all the way around the eye. It made Doherty look as if he had grown himself a smoked monocle.

Doherty did not stand the banter as well as I had expected him to. To all our questions he answered nothing—simply nothing. The minute Sills let

go of him, he bounded out and down the corridor toward the locker room. I was right after him.

"Hand ball?" I suggested.

He nodded.

For the next hour and a half Doherty played the most vicious game of hand ball I have ever seen him play. He cursed, he whanged himself into the walls, he beat me to a standstill. It was evident that the man was working off steam.

After the shower I got the Scotch out of my locker and had Sam serve us a highball away over in the corner.

"Now, Doherty, old bum, how did you get it?" I began.

Slowly the lines on his face relaxed and smoothed into a reluctant smile.

"Well, Joe," he said finally, "I suppose the joke is on me." He hesitated. "You know Gertrude—"

Then he stopped. Yes, I knew his wife. Lord, what a woman! One of those you go mad over and hate at the same time. A magnificent creature, a saint, a devil, a—well, let us just say, a woman.

"You realize," Doherty went on, "how hard she is to handle, now and then."

How many times I had seen her when she went on a tear, insulted the hostess, broke up the party, told everything and everybody to go to hell, and walked out! Hard to handle!

Yes, I knew. I nodded.

"Let me ask you something else. You know Butch Powers?"

I shook my head.

"Or Maxine Oviatt?"

"No."

"Well, you ought to know them."

Doherty sat back and drained his glass.

"They're not married, you know," he continued. "Have an apartment—that's all. He's a free-lance artist, and she—well, she is too. Yellow-haired tiger type. Butch is built more like an Airedale—much nastier disposition, though. Well, I was out with Butch

and Maxine and their gang, night before last. Wanted to get Butch to do a series of sketches for me. He dragged me into the party. At some cuckoo bootleg joint, it was, with roses and grapes and bananas painted all over the walls. Anyhow, everybody got tight. There they were, evening dress and everything, all swearing, throwing bread sticks, singing, knocking down chairs, making enough noise for an army.

"Well, Joe, finally the bird that ran the place told them they'd have to pipe down. They were all nice enough about it except Maxine.

"'Pipe down'? she sneered. 'The hell I will!'

"So she jumped up on one of the tables and began to dance, kicking the china to the floor and singing at the top of her voice—screaming, rather.

"'You'll either have to quit that or get out,' said the manager, rather decently; but she mocked him.

"'You can't throw me out!' she jeered at him.

"With that Butch jumped up and said, short and sharp:

"'Cut the fun, Maxine. Come on—snap out of it!'

"She kicked at him, swore at him, laughed at him. He and Grub Sears picked her off the table, wiggling like a fish—picked her off and carried her out into the car, and we all started for Butch's apartment."

"Doherty," I put in, "what's this got to do with your black eye?"

"Hold your horses," he told me.

"When we got to the apartment, we started up the stairs—Maxine quiet but defiant, Butch silent. Butch went first, and waited on the halfway landing. When Maxine reached the landing, she turned up her chin at him. Butch didn't say a word. He just let fly his right at her chin—took her on the end of it and crumpled her up on the landing—knocked her out.

"The rest of us just stared. We couldn't say a word. Butch made no

move to touch the girl. He pulled down his sleeves, fixed his tie, walked on upstairs to his apartment, sat down in an easy chair, and began to read the paper.

"Grub Sears and I carried Maxine up and put her on the bed in the back bedroom. The girls undressed her. She was still unconscious. We talked, in low tones, in the dining room. The thing had sobered everybody. Every so often we could hear Butch turn a page.

"Well, we were thoroughly disgusted. Not one of that gang—and they're all rounders—had ever seen a man knock a woman out like that, in cold blood. Two of the bunch said they were through—they never wanted to see Butch again. They left. The rest of us stayed. The girls wanted to see how Maxine would be when she came to. There was some discussion of talking the thing through with Butch, but we all decided that talk would be wasted on that sort of a cad.

"Just then there was a cry from the back room. It was Maxine.

"Butch! Butch darling! Sweet-heart! Where are you? Oh, Butch, lover, I want you, I need you! Oh,

dearest, I'm so sorry! Oh, love me, kiss me, Butch, quick, quick!"

"Butch folded his paper. He walked past us with a sardonic smile on his face—walked out into the bedroom. We heard Maxine's screams subsiding into a sort of purring stream of endearments and kisses. Again, there was nothing to say. We all got out right then and there. I walked all the way home."

Doherty began to stare out of the window.

"Well," I said indignantly, "you haven't explained—"

"There isn't much to explain," he answered. "Last night, at the Whitcomb party, Gertrude got on another of her tantrums. I finally got her home. I waited for her on the landing at the top of the stairs. When she got up to me, I socked her on the chin."

I was about to ask a question when the light dawned.

"Laugh, damn you!" Doherty snorted. "Yes, I socked her on the chin, and she turned around and socked me in the eye, and I fell all the way downstairs. I spent the night at a hotel. Haven't been home since. Got another drink in that bottle, Joe?"

#### PERIGEE TIDES

THE people of the summer go,  
And the wind it laughs its big "Yo-Ho!"  
And the waves come dashing in with glee,  
For the moon and the tide are in perigee;  
And the perigee tide round the garden floats  
And carries off old sleepy boats,  
And the whole mad world goes on a spree.

Strange things come up on the perigee tide,  
Strange lost, wrecked things from far and wide,  
Sea-weed and shell and drifting spar,  
Strange wildness and wonder from afar.  
Strange voices come on the hoarse night breeze,  
As the stormy twilight rocks the trees,  
And ghostly birds blown in from sea—  
For the moon and the tide are in perigee.

*Richard Le Gallienne*



# Darling of the Race Track

*A Story of Thoroughbreds, Particularly the Stake Horse That Did His Bit to Improve the Breed of Men!*

By Brock Mays



ATCHING anything?"

The Dancing Kid wearily tossed his weighted hook beyond the outer edge of the rolling surf, and morosely eyed his questioner.

"Rest, meditation, and solitude," he explained coldly.

The inquisitive stranger took the hint, sniffed, and walked away.

The Kid dangled a cigarette from his thin lips, vainly endeavored to gain a comfortable position on the hard boards of the Imperial Beach pier, and patiently deciphered the pictures painted by fleecy clouds, haze, and purple mountain peaks that towered to the southward.

For it was Monday, day of rest for horsemen, and at the Empressa Hipodromo the normal roar and bustle of the Tiajuana race track crowd, the continuous clack of the mutuel totalizers,

and the thrill of thundering hoofs were replaced by a vague silence. And the Kid, like other members of his clan, was seeking recreation in his own particular way.

He finally abandoned his finny quest, gathered his gear together, and strolled shoreward. Down the beach, where the surf had packed the fine white sand into resilient hardness, he discerned a mounted figure, moving rapidly toward him. He studied it professionally a moment.

"Funny action," he mused, "but lots of pep— Sweet children of Fair Play! It's an old woman!"

The horse eased up abreast a small cluster of houses and came to a stop. His rider slid to the ground, peeled off

saddle and bridle, and slapped her mount affectionately on the flank. Slowly the animal waded out into the line of gentle breakers, until at last his feet left the sand and he began to swim.

"Must be a circus around here," the Kid murmured to himself, and curiosity overcame him.

"Nice looking horse you have," he offered.

The old lady shot the Kid a swift, appraising glance; obviously she was pleased by his statement.

"Yes," she replied. "He was a stake winner once."

The horse left the water, shook himself, and showed a tendency to roll. The woman grasped him by the forelock and walked him slowly to a turf inclosure in the rear of an unpainted bungalow.

She then seized a gunny sack hanging on the fence, and began to dry him down. The Dancing Kid promptly relieved her of the task.

"Here; let me do that," he said gruffly. As he roughly dried the right foreleg, he paused to examine a large swelling at the knee joint.

"He had a bad fall," the woman explained. "That's what put him out of racing. For a long time he seemed afraid to bear any weight on it, but it's getting much better now. The callosities seem to have settled firmly around the bone."

"I noticed he favored that leg a little," the Kid remarked.

As he finished his task, the woman threw both arms around the old horse's head, and hugged him tight to her breast for a moment.

"It's sort of a foolish sentiment," she admitted, "but I'd hate to lose him. He brings back memories of happier days. Don't you, Maori?"

"Maori!" the Kid exclaimed. "You don't mean the Derby winner?"

"Yes," she replied softly. "He won the classic seven years ago. He was a great horse, but unlucky."

Astonishment held the Kid in its grip.

"Wouldn't you like some tea?" she tentatively invited.

Tea was an unknown rite to the Dancing Kid, but he accepted with alacrity.

She led the way into the house, where bright colors and dainty curtains did their best to hide the flimsy walls and cheap furniture.

"I am Mrs. Carruthers."

Deep from his lore of the race track the Kid resurrected and connected the names of the little old lady and her horse.

"Not Derby Nell?"

"Why, yes. They used to call me that."

He drew a whistle of surprise and nearly dropped his teacup.

"But—but—hell! That is—excuse me, but imagine finding you here! I'm the Dancing Kid. I work down at the race track, and, of course, I've heard of you."

The Kid's statement was technically correct. He and his pal, Surething Reilly, worked any one they could—without too much risk.

"I've been here for some time," the old lady remarked. "I like it. I used to be very lonely, but Maori has helped to keep the blues away."

"Is it true," the Kid asked diffidently, "that you have seen every Derby ever run?"

She laughed, a low, silvery tinkle.

"They took me in a Moses basket to see Aristides win in eighteen hundred and seventy-five. I don't think I was old enough to enjoy it. Since then I have seen them all, including Maori's victory. That was the last." Her voice was shadowed with regret for bygone days.

Before the eyes of the Dancing Kid flashed a vision impressed upon his youthful memory a few short years before:

Gerry Carruthers, sporting horseman, plunging gambler, and his attrac-

tive wire, the toast of a thousand lips in the world of the thoroughbreds. Maori, pride of his stable, badly injured. Then other disasters; a fire at the training stable; auction sale of a few horses; oblivion in the court of the sport of kings.

The Kid juggled his teacup to safety on a near-by table, glared at it indignantly, and cleared his throat.

"I thought Bart Wilkins bought all your horses," he remarked.

"He did," she replied. "After the fire he took those that were left. Maori came West with the others. He's a gelding, and when Wilkins found that he couldn't be brought back to training he sold him to a livery stable. I recognized him on the street, and bought him from a huckster for seventy-five dollars."

A shrewd, uncanny thought suddenly was born in the Dancing Kid's agile brain.

"He's full of run," he said casually. "Nice action, too."

"Oh, yes! It was almost two years before I could ride him. He would hardly put his bad foot on the ground. The soft sand and swimming have helped him a lot."

"He might stand training."

"I'm afraid not. He's ten years old, and I don't believe his leg is strong enough for the pounding it would get on the track."

"Don't you ever go to the races?" The Kid's question was a thinly veiled invitation.

"No, it hardly seems like racing out here. At first I wanted so much to get away from all the old familiar scenes; I wanted to forget. But now, I'd like to go back to see the Downs and a Derby again—just once before Maori and I—make the Last Parade to the Post."

The Dancing Kid was embarrassed at the sentiment. He twirled his cap for a moment and said, with an air of detachment:

"Well, I guess I'd better be shoving

along. I'd like to come up and see you some time; maybe give Maori a good going over; his coat could stand a lot of currying."

"Please do," she urged. "Come for tea."

## II

THE Dancing Kid fumbled his way out the door, eyes blurred with unexpected emotion. This fine old lady trusted him. He paused for a moment beside the bungalow and deciphered the word "dressmaking" crudely painted on a shingle.

"Of all the tough breaks," he told himself, "this is the worst I've ever seen. Derby Nell!"

Softly he went around the side of the house. Unseen, he gazed long and steadily at Maori, grazing in his inclosure.

The Kid's thin lips pursed tightly together, and sweet and full he breathed forth the silvery notes of the bugle call to the post. Instantly the horse's head was flung erect, and with a few brisk steps he pressed his chest against the wire fence, ears pricked sharply forward, nickering ecstatically toward that lilting thrill from days gone by.

The Dancing Kid slowly approached.

"Well, old fellow," he said soothingly, "I guess there might be a gallop left in you yet."

He passed his hand over the telltale hollows above the eyes, and pinched the lower lip with inquisitive fingers, finding there the unblemished firmness of youth. He threw an arm aloft in a threatening gesture, causing the thoroughbred to rear back, rolling his eyes, thus disclosing the slight red flare that denotes a thoroughbred's unimpaired stamina and vitality.

"Never was raced much," the Kid muttered. He rubbed Maori affectionately behind the ears, then quietly made his way toward the paved road and a stage to Tiajuana. For the Dancing

Kid was at heart a true expatriate, and although he followed the bangtails to the farthest reaches of the merry-go-rounds, he ever yearned for Thanksgiving Day to come that he might go "home" to winter racing on the white and green Mexican oval, and settle down among the care-free joys of Old Town.

He entered his room, finding Surething Reilly, close companion in their never-ending search for sure things, absorbed in the mysteries of the last official form chart. The Kid picked up the Stud Book, opened it with a practiced hand, and read aloud:

"Maori, bay gelding, by Marathon-Bacchante. Say, Surething, what sort of a sire is Marathon?"

"Pretty fair," Reilly grunted. "His get can run all day, but they never have liked anything but a fast track."

The Kid eased himself out the door and was gone before Surething's succeeding question reached his ears. He trudged to the Foreign Club, a palace of chance, and quietly signaled Overcoat O'Brien away from a table where five gentlemen of fortune were trying to outguess one another.

In a few terse sentences he explained his equine find to this cool, gray-eyed gambler, known wherever horses gallop. His nickname was earned one sweltering day in August when he stood on the block at Saratoga in an overcoat, and with frigid calm took the bets of New York plungers who sought to break him. Their dark horse had lost by a whisker, and thereafter O'Brien and an overcoat had been as inseparable as bread and butter.

As the Kid finished his tale, the gambler turned swiftly and wrote a check.

"Here's five grand," he said coolly. "Tell Derby Nell there's plenty more where that came from. Gerry Carruthers' wife—the darling of the race track— Why, damn my soul!"

The Dancing Kid quietly returned the slip of paper.

"She's playing a bum hand well," he admonished the gambler. "She'd be insulted if you or any one else offered her money. Our only hope is to bring Maori back to the races, and I'm not even sure that she'll let us do that. She's funny, that way."

"Ten years old, and a cripple, you said? Son, there isn't a chance!"

The Kid's vivid dream was rapidly fading away. He clutched O'Brien pleadingly by the sleeve.

"You don't have to bother about it, Overcoat. Let me have a couple of hundred to cover expenses, and I'll see if I can't get him into shape."

Overcoat walked back to the table, picked a yellow chip from his pile, and tossed it to the Kid.

"There's five hundred. Cash it over at the desk. There's more any time you want it." He nodded in dismissal, and again turned his attention to the intricacies of stud poker.

### III

A GREAT change came over the easy-going life of the Dancing Kid. His interests shifted from the swiftly moving world of the race track to a small beach cottage, a gentle old lady, and a crippled thoroughbred.

Up before daylight, each morning found the Kid on his way to Imperial Beach, and each night found him early wrapped in sleep, induced by the unaccustomed physical toil. And under his rigorous care Maori gradually came to hand; alert, coat shiny, hard of muscle, hoofs sound, well shod and polished.

One afternoon the Kid put the old horse through his final test. For two miles he sent the gelding along the beach at a spanking gait, then added another half, hard driven, full out. And at the end he was satisfied with his charge's easy breathing, speed, and readiness to run.

"Mrs. Carruthers," he said offhandedly, "I believe this old horse might win a race. S'pose you let me take him down to the track?"



The reason behind the Kid's untiring efforts with Maori came swiftly to her mind.

"Oh, Kid, I'd really rather not do that," she objected. "It's silly, but some sentiment, some unhappy memory, warns me that it would be wrong to race him."

The Kid knew the futility of bucking another person's hunch, and decided to await a more auspicious moment for urging his plea—a moment which never came.

Disillusioned, discouraged, for the first time in many weeks he sought the solace of Surething Reilly's conversation.

"Yes, sir, if she'd only let us go, that horse has a real chance to cop the Tiajuana Cup," the Kid declared. "Two miles; ten thousand added; and you admit that the farther they go the better those Marathons like it."

"Bart Wilkins's Vital has that race all won," Surething returned. "You can write your own ticket on the rest of the field. Anyway, the Indian medicine man told me it's going to rain all next week, and no Marathon ever foaled could run a lick on a soft track. What you ought to do is pick out a small cheap race, get the boys together, put down a nice bet for Derby Nell, and we'll all stage an old-fashioned shoo-in."

"She wouldn't take it," the Kid replied.

"Well, then, let the crippled horse go back into the huckster business, where he belongs."

The Dancing Kid made no retort.

"The landlady's looking hostile and hounding me for the rent," Reilly went on. "If you'd stop this dreaming and do a little hustling maybe we could get on top. As it is, I see you about as often as Man-o'-War saw Eclipse!"

"I'm broke and I'm busy," the Kid rejoined curtly.

Overcoat's stake had dwindled under the pressure of new equipment, feed, and training expenses to a few tattered

bills, and pride forbade that the Kid ask again for help.

And true to the prophecy of the medicine man, rain fell for days in gloomy sheets.

Oblivious to the many insurmountable obstacles which the whims of fate had placed in his path, the Dancing Kid continued to work Maori, hoping to find some last minute solution to his problem.

As the old gelding padded his way along the rain-soaked sand, his rider pondered upon the reasons why some horses run better in the mud—heredity, sureness of action, diseased feet that enjoy the ease of bounding along on softened clay.

A new thought flashed through the Kid's mind. Quickly he dismounted, tested the depth and firmness of the sand with his heel, and dribbled a handful of it through his fingers.

"It's not exactly like any sort of a track," he mused. "A thin cushion on top, then hard and solid underneath. He might do it! That bad knee has made him careful how he picks 'em up and puts 'em down."

Hesitating belief in his theory became a certainty under the Kid's flame of desire.

"I had a letter from my cousin today," Derby Nell informed the Kid, after the latter had rubbed down the horse and put him in his stall. "She wants me to come back home."

"Let me start Maori in the Cup tomorrow," he urged, "and you can get on Easy Street again."

"I'm sorry, Kid; after all you've done, but something warns me against it! I can't." Her voice was tinged with sincere regret. "I'm saving a little money, and next year, perhaps, I'll be able to go home."

The Dancing Kid coughed violently; days of exposure had given him a harsh cold. And silently he journeyed to his room, deep in thought. Surething Reilly bitterly resented his lack

of confidence.

The Kid tossed the whole night through in a fever, shot through with shadowy dreams of torture if he did not come immediately to the succor of Derby Nell.

#### IV.

THE next day dawned more gloomy and rain-swept than its predecessors. The Kid plunged his throbbing head in a basin of cold water; his fever-dried lips spurned breakfast.

Painfully he clambered aboard a northbound stage, aching in his every joint. Derby Nell threw open the door of her little dwelling with a gesture of welcome.

"Why, Kid!" she exclaimed. "You look sick."

"Aw, I'm all right," he muttered. Then he added desperately, his pride in his boots:

"Say, Mrs. Carruthers, could you let me have a little money?"

"Of course; just a minute." She took a roll of bills from a teapot. The Kid estimated it at a glance.

"I need about sixty dollars," he said. "I'll pay you back first thing to-morrow." He shoved the money in his pocket, mumbled his thanks, and departed.

Slowly he made his way toward the highway, then, watching the bungalow cautiously, he turned and retraced his steps to the flimsy stable which sheltered Maori. The horse nickered softly as he recognized his visitor.

The Kid quickly blanketed him and led him to the road, carefully keeping in line with the stable between the rear windows of the bungalow. Then the Dancing Kid rode out on the muddy highway toward the Tiajuana race track, stopping now and then while a paroxysm of coughing shook his thin, wasted body.

In the paddock the field for the Tiajuana Cup was being saddled. A cold, driving rain swept over the stands, causing the scattered crowd of dyed-

in-the-wool enthusiasts to huddle together for comfort, and spotting the muddy course with slowly widening pools of water.

Tail and mane crudely braided, big-boned and awkward looking, Maori impatiently tossed his bridle. In a stall near by, Vital, a stake horse of the highest caliber, stood steadily, muscles lightly trembling with anticipation. Vital's owner, Bart Wilkins, stared sneeringly at the older horse.

"Does he bark?" he queried with mock concern. "You ought to save him for the dog races over at Aguascalientes."

"He was horse enough to make a lot of others like it in the Derby," the Dancing Kid growled.

"He's old enough to be your father. He ate more oats and earned less money than any nag I ever owned. Vital can spot him a mile and win under wraps. They should have arrested me for burglary when I gave him away."

"They must have known you," the Kid retorted. "He may be a dog, but we've been treating him like a horse. We don't beat him, feed him hop, tickle him with a battery, or race him every day."

Wilkins flushed scarlet and turned away. His reputation for cruelty to horses was a byword around the race track among the insiders.

The Dancing Kid smothered a fit of painful coughing, then took little, bow-legged Jockey Grosso by the arm and led him to a corner of the stall.

"Listen, Eddie," he husked. "Take him down the middle of the track where the going is solid underneath. Keep him under restraint for the first mile and a half, if he pulls your arms off. When Vital makes his move, you make yours, and race it out between you! Make no mistakes; we're betting our own money!"

Grosso nodded his understanding. The Kid boosted him into the saddle, and made his way toward the betting

ring. Surething Reilly met him at the paddock gate, program in hand.

"Say," he demanded, "how about this?" He shoved the program at the Kid. The latter fought the dizzy spots before his eyes and read:

"Maori; 115 pounds; owner, Mrs. Nell Carruthers; trainer, James C. Alderson."

"Yeah," he muttered, "that's him, all right."

"Well," said Reilly, "that horse might as well be in the barn as trying to race on a track like this, and you don't look any too good yourself. Come on, I'll take you home."

"Let me alone," the Kid responded peevishly, and staggered away to the book of Easy Money Cohen, where he added his last thirty dollars to the sixty he had borrowed from Derby Nell, and placed it all on Maori's nose at the juicy odds of one hundred to one.

## V

"THEY'RE off!"

A faint-hearted, straggling roar welled up from the sodden crowd. The horses lunged into their strides, each jockey taking a firm hold to conserve his mount during the early running. Mud and water splattered under pounding hoofs.

The Dancing Kid vainly shrugged in his water-soaked clothing for comfort and warmth, and, shaking violently with the cold, endeavored to follow the progress of the flying field through the driving rain. Down the backstretch they thundered, five of the horses closely bunched, fighting for the lead, followed by Vital, with Maori trailing by several lengths.

"Attaboy!" the Kid coughed, noting that the old horse lunged against the bit and fought for his head at every stride.

Passing the judges' stand, beginning the second mile, an undersized horse, Little Soldier, shot out from the pack and quickly opened up a lead of several lengths.

"Trying to steal it," the Kid muttered to himself as he scanned the rest of the field. Silks muddled beyond recognition, numbers obscured; jockeys bending low to protect their faces from flying clods; the strange, struggling pack thundered on.

Trembling as with the ague, nerves torn, teeth rattling, the Dancing Kid desperately fought a haze of weakness. His eyes now discerned only weird, misshapen figures on the track. He clutched his nearest neighbor.

"Where are they?" he begged. "Keep an eye on 'em."

"Rounding the far turn," the stranger answered. "Little Soldier in front and fading fast. The last two horses are making their move—looks like Vital and that long shot, Maori. Yes; that's right."

The roar of the crowd spurred the Kid's flagging senses.

"Now?" he prayed. "Now?"

"Turning for home," the stranger explained with a curious glance at the Dancing Kid. "Vital's in front, just galloping; he's as good as in! Well, I guess I'll go cash my tickets. I've earned the money—rainy day."

"Wait a minute," the Kid pleaded. "Where's Maori?"

"Laying second. Hell! He's coming again!"

And suddenly the clouds drifted clear from the eyes of the Dancing Kid.

Down the stretch came the mighty Vital, with Maori running steadily at his flanks. The Kid's husky voice barked above the clamor of the throng.

"Oh, you Maori! Come home! Come on, baby! Come on! Come on!"

Inch by inch Maori's nostrils crept along Vital's side. Doggedly hand-riding, mud-stained and pelted beyond all recognition, Jockey Eddie Grosso urged his mount to the utmost. And in one last, desperate lunge the old horse passed under the wire, a nose in front!

The Kid made his way to the circle of the initiated about the winner.

"Nice ride, Eddie," he said. "Tell Jackson to take care of the horse, will you?"

Stolidly he accepted the silver cup, emblem of victory. He collected the purse, and neatly stowed it in an old-fashioned draw-neck poke. Tucking the trophy under his coat, he paused to cash his bet; then, skillfully avoiding his friends, he walked from the race track.

At the international boundary line sickness again nearly overcame him. Long ages he waited for the north-bound stage that took him to Palm City.

Then down the highway he plodded two weary miles to his goal, feet sloshing endlessly through a sea of mud. And finally with one last supreme effort he stumbled up to the door of a little bungalow near the sea.

The Dancing Kid awakened in a world of shining white. He blinked his eyes a moment.

"What's this?" he asked in a strange, frightened voice.

"S-s-sh-h-h," a gentle murmur admonished him. "You've been very ill with pneumonia. You're in the hospital. Eat this, please."

The Kid sipped a little steaming broth, and promptly slid back into the darkness of oblivion.

When next he awakened he recognized the figure of Overcoat O'Brien standing near his bed. The gambler's face worked queerly for a moment before he spoke.

"You're a great little fellow, Kid," the big man said huskily.

Then Derby Nell came forward to say a few trembling words of thanks. As she kissed the Kid on the forehead, he murmured:

"Darling of the race track! Maori a hundred to one! Just say hello to Kentucky for me, Mrs. Carruthers, when you go back home!"

Surething Reilly gripped his pal's hand in approbation, and asked in a puzzled tone:

"Say, Kid, who is this James C. Alderson that trained Maori?"

"Why," the Dancing Kid replied, "that's me. It's my square-shooter name, you see."

---

#### A CHILD'S LAUGH

THE melody of mocking bird  
That tumbles forth on summer air,  
Spreads magic joy when overheard  
Not more than thy swift laughter there,  
Sweet child, with ne'er a care.

Such joy, abandon, youth, delight,  
Sweet privilege of thee and thine,  
Thou canst not prize the gift aright,  
Nor feel how precious, how divine,  
While still the boon is thine.

Oh, wonderful the power to laugh,  
To know such freedom of the soul,  
Thy spirit's tonic thus to quaff,  
To own the world, the part or whole,  
And care not for thy dole.

*Virginia Goff*





THE BOY SCORNE THE  
WATER LURE

## Bob Davis Recalls

*A Story of the American Frontier When Even Boys Were Men*

By Bob Davis

**T**HIS is a story about as brave a boy perhaps, and brainy, as ever lived. Evidently it was the plan of destiny that he should carry out the great acts of courage and intelligence that fate had mapped for him, and then disappear. In any case all the records that might at one time have existed are obliterated, and the lips from which I heard the story forty years ago are hushed forever. The teller of the tale was the late Captain Jack Crawford, the poet

scout, who served under General Nelson A. Miles during the Indian campaigns when the far frontier of the West was sparsely settled and the tread of the buffalo wiped out the trails of the white men faring across the continent into the uncharted new lands.

As this story lacks all the elements of fiction I must account for the characters in the order of their coming into my own life, or of my coming into theirs. Have your choice.

My father was missionary among

the Indians of Nebraska between the years 1865-1869. Captain Crawford was a frequent visitor at his fireside. The Federal troops were hot on the trail of Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, Rain-in-the-Face and their warrior braves. Whenever there was a lull in hostilities Crawford, who was a raw, unlettered youth, of humble people, came in to Brownsville, Nebraska, where the mission was located, and where he literally went to school. It was there that he learned to read and write. Twenty years after, when the Indians had been brought under control, Captain Jack attached himself to Buffalo Bill Cody and went into the show business.

When I was about fifteen years of age Colonel Cody, with his grand theatrical aggregation of frontier actors, came into Nevada and toured the State. Captain Jack Crawford, who still clung to his flowing locks, played the rôle of Yellow Hair in a border drama that reeked with blood and thunder. At Carson City, the capital of the State, my father was conducting a peaceful parish of people with pale faces. In memory of the old missionary days in Nebraska, Captain Jack, accompanied by a Cheyenne Indian known as "Six Toes," called on our family. The meeting of the old friends, indeed cordial, was celebrated by Captain Jack whipping out his trusty six-shooter and shooting a hole in the tin letter box at the front gate.

After a formal reception Six Toes returned to the livery stable down street that had been turned temporarily into an actors' boarding house. He marched away with a bundle containing half a boiled ham, cake, jam, bread and fruits in season. Indians care not how many courses are served if served all at once. Captain Jack remained for dinner and wore his guns through the entire meal. Some of our juvenile neighbors walked by our house half a dozen times just to glimpse the great actor-scout and to hear reverberations

of his sonorous voice reciting his own poetry.

When the meal had been cleared away Crawford began to talk about the numerous Indian campaigns in American history. The story that remains freshest in my mind was about a white boy who had been sent with a flag of truce to receive terms from a band of Indians besieging a party of white settlers that had driven into the bed of a dry river. Ammunition was low in both camps and the issue under consideration involved the question as to which group could hold out the longer. I shall tell the story in Captain Crawford's own words, burned indelibly into my mind:

"You must understand first off that the settlers had plenty of food in their prairie wagons and about twenty good horses, also tents and blankets. But they had no water. The Indians were camped at a spring, and, being on the chase, had little food and no shelter. Both parties had carried on a sniping engagement for two days, with little advantage to anybody. They were about equally matched as to numbers. On the morning of the third day the settlers, who were tortured with thirst, decided to send a fourteen-year-old boy with a flag of truce to ask the Indians what they wanted.

"'You had better tell him what to say if they ask questions,' said the boy's mother.

"'No living man can instruct him. He must face this ordeal alone,' said the father. 'Self-reliance will give him the strength to do the right thing. I won't tie his hands.'

"'He is our first born. The Indians will think you have not the courage to go yourself,' replied the mother. 'If he should not—return?'

"'Wife, there are no cowards in our family; your people and mine are incapable of bringing weaklings into this world. Our son is the only hope. If I carry this flag of truce and am slain God alone knows what conse-

quences will follow. The boy must go. It would be worse than cowardice for me to select another. The Indians will respect his bravery. Son!

"The pioneer looked into the eyes of his offspring for an answer.

"'Yes, father. I am ready,' was the firm response. The mother clutched him to her breast, sobbed an incoherent sentence consigning him to the care of God and kissed him on the lips. But the sire of that boy, holding out his hand man-fashion, said good-by, handed his son a strip of white cloth and pushed him gently from the barricade into the open.

"The other members of the party spoke their farewells as the boy walked away, but not once did he turn his face back to his loved ones, or falter in his march to the camp of the enemy.

"He crossed the open space with the white flag lifted high over his head, and arrived among the besiegers who received him with an invitation to sit down and pow-wow.

"'What you want?' he asked.

"An Indian who understood the question pointed to a horse and held up ten fingers. The boy frowned and seated himself stubbornly, shaking his head at intervals. The chief of the raiders said something to one of his redskins, who withdrew to the spring and returned with an army pannikin brimming with clear, cold water, which he placed on the ground at the boy's crossed feet. The impulse to seize that crystal draft and quench his thirst almost overpowered him, but instead he washed his hands, wet his hair and threw the soiled water on the grass.

"Stunned, but still crafty, the Indian filled another pannikin and held it to the boy's lips. He pushed it aside with the remark: 'We got plenty water.' Then he picked up his flag of truce and arose as though about to depart. The Indian held up five fingers as a compromise, to which the boy responded with three fingers.

"'Yes! You catchum! Mares!

answered the Indian after reflection. 'Catchum grub, too.'

"The boy returned at once to his father, explained the terms, received some flour and bacon and the three mares, which he led to a distant hill half a mile away from the water hole, the flag of truce still fluttering. The Indians, observing that the terms of the agreement were being carried out and that the boy's presence was a guaranty against reprisal, broke camp, galloped to the neutral ground, received the horses and disappeared in single file, leaving the young ambassador to return on foot.

"That boy," said Crawford, combing his long locks with his fingers, "did two remarkable things which stamped him as heroic. It took courage to refuse the drinking water that was set before him, but it required brains to deliver the three mares half a mile from the spring. A man can conceal his thirst, but a horse cannot. The boy knew that if those famished animals got within sight of that water hole nothing could have held them, and that his diplomacy would have come to naught. What a scene must have been enacted at that spring when the white settlers came up to it. The last one of the party to quench his thirst was the boy who bore the flag of true and made the terms."

I often reflect upon that thrilling tale of the nameless boyish hero treading the grass of the prairie and stalking death, and the thought always occurs to me that Jack Crawford might have done the same thing had he the opportunity. There is no better place than here to record in the life of the poet scout an incident that defines him as a man of the loftiest principles.

As before stated in the preface of this narrative Crawford sprang from the humblest people and practically educated himself. His occupation as an army scout brought him into daily contact with frontiersmen and characters whose creed was the survival of

the fittest, though not always the finest. He served Uncle Sam over a wide range of country peopled with desperate men. He carried the mails through hostile sections, linked the widely separated army posts in hazardous riding and lived a life that required sheer courage. The story of his career is little more than a catalogue of hair-breadth escapes. He rode alone into many a pass from which he emerged as if by miracle.

When the great frontier was finally opened and the Indians put down he was a man without occupation. In the meanwhile he had widened his vision, through the reading of good books, and contributed many interesting historical articles to the magazines, all of them dealing with the far western frontier. He had a gift for poetry and issued a volume entitled "Where the Hand of God is Seen." It was a salutation to the boundless West which he knew so well.

Those who recall him in later life will remember that he walked with a perceptible limp. Amazing as it may seem I was present when he received the wound that halted his splendid stride. And what is more to the point, it occurred on the evening of the same day when, wide-eyed and thrilled, I heard him tell the story of the pioneer's brave son who had refused the crystal draft offered by the red man.

Following the dinner that Captain Jack attended at our home we all went to the theater to see the scout in the rôle of Yellow Hair.

It was a thunderous performance reverberating with pistol shots, Indian whoops and scenes of conflict between red and white men. In the second act Captain Jack, garbed in all the magnificence of the buck-skinned frontier, came upon the stage on a white horse, armed to the teeth. A brave Indian chief emerged from ambush and hurled a challenge at Yellow Hair, a challenge that was at once accepted. The red-skin drew his knife and leaped for the

white man. Yellow Hair drew his six-shooter to kill his enemy. "A pistol shot rang out" in conformity with the best customs of the border drama. Unfortunately the blank cartridge exploded prematurely and the wad entered the groin of Yellow Hair, who fell from his horse and lay in great pain while a pool of blood formed a red stain on the stage.

There was a great commotion in the theater, but Crawford made no outcry. Suddenly from a stage box leaped a spectator with a flask of brandy which he offered the rapidly sinking actor.

"Drink this, Jack. It will revive you," he said, pressing the flask to the whitening lips. But the wounded man was thinking of something else.

"No," he replied faintly. "When I was a boy I promised my mother that I would never touch liquor."

"But you're bleeding to death."

"Well, if that's so, it's too late to begin now."

Jack Crawford pushed the flask away and promptly fainted.

He was revived later without the use of stimulants and after two weeks was again in the saddle playing his old rôle of Yellow Hair.

During his whole lifetime Captain Jack Crawford was an abstemious man, a brave soldier and a credit to his people. He lived a full life during a period when bravery was the custom of the country, an epoch when even boys were men.

The last time I saw the poet scout was in New York. He had grown gray and sentimental, and still wore his hair long. I recalled the story I had heard from his lips out West.

"I often think of that boy," said Crawford, recombining his locks. "God knows what became of him. He didn't belong to the army or work for the government. Wouldn't he have made a great name in Uncle Sam's diplomatic corps? One of the few mortals who really escaped the slip between the cup and the lip."





By H. I. Phillips

*A Famous Humorist, in Telling the Story of the Obese Damsel and the Starvation Diet, Brings Cheerful News to Plump Charmers*

**N**OW, all my brothers, that in a certain city of such richness that the gasoline stations were as the mansions of merchant princes, there resided a woman who had been born too early to grasp the basic idea of a diet of lettuce leaves.

Into this world had she come at a time when the gross tonnage of its dwellers was the glory of a nation, and when the figure of a damsel was proclaimed of rare beauty only if the curves of the torso were like those of a detour through the Adirondacks.

This was in the period when the wise men did stroke their beards and proclaim:

"Truly without she have the appetite of a horse, and reach always for the second and third helping with both hands, no damsel can wax healthy and be pleasing to look upon. We have spoken!"

Now this woman did have parents who spread a table which knew no stop signal and the legs of which made mighty creakings beneath the load of fodder placed thereon.

And lo! It was the custom to eat three times a day and put cream and, aye, even sugar in the coffee!

Know you that in those days butter was openly placed upon the table in jars as big as beer trays, and white bread was stacked in front of every

plate like handbills in a printery. And Haroun el-Thompson had not written the volume which is known as "Eat and Grow Thin."

Now this woman did attain an age of thirty-five before she came to see any wrong in guzzling thickened soups, and the zany did not even wince at the mention of mashed potatoes, creamed ham, roast pork or pie à la mode.

Nor did she shake in terror when her nostrils, which were like the intake valves of a Hispano-Suiza, inhaled the rich aroma of cabinet puddings and hot

biscuits. Instead, she smacked her lips.

Lo! She did even rejoice at presentations of bonbons and nougates, which were truly as fattening as transfusions of molasses. And she did loiter in her peregrinations in the ba-



zaars to sip of the nut sundae and to hoist great heapings of ice cream to her mouth, which was as the entrance to the Hudson tunnel.

And she had attained the dimensions of a Mack truck before ever her ears, which were like door-knobs, did hear of the calory and the Vitamins A and B.

## II

Now she has been in marriage all these many years with a certain merchant called el-Whoozis, who was a good husband and reasonably bound down by his business, but who in the course of time did come to take notice of the damsels called Flap-Pahs in the market place bazaars and lobbies. And she did indulge in lamentations, imploring thus-

wise: "Oh, what a calamity! What a bad break! So diligent have I been with the knife and fork all these years that I am now like a quorum. All about me there are women who pleaseth my husband, yet

And lo! It did come to pass that he grew increasingly critical and regarded his lady as a curiosity, a verdict to which he could have rallied few dissenters.

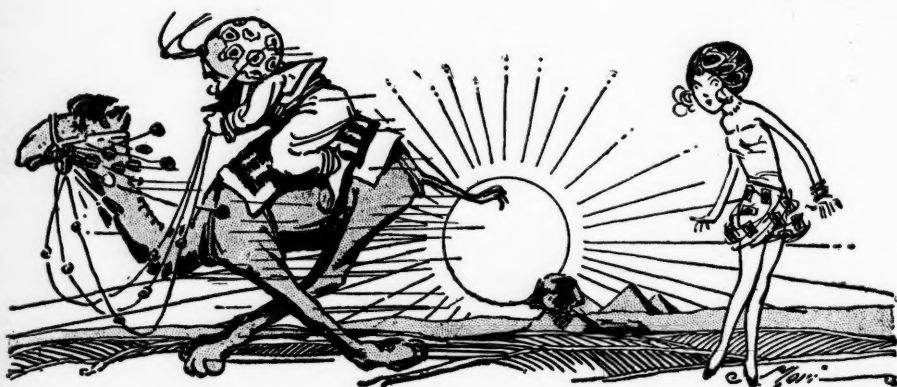
Know you, then, that this wife, whose weight was now as that of an adult bullock, did perceive el-Whoozis's growing coldness, and did observe harsh comments upon her form, and did take cognizance of the agitations of his eyebrows whenever he did pass Flap-Pahs in the market place bazaars and lobbies. And she did indulge in lamentations, imploring thus-

wise: "Oh, what a calamity! What a bad break! So diligent have I been with the knife and fork all these years that I am now like a quorum. All about me there are women who pleaseth my husband, yet

when he is at home he sulketh in a chair and listeneth to the radio. What shall I do?"

And a voice did make reply as follows:

"Woman, reduce! Starve thyself into a pleasing shape. Watch thy sugars and starches. Count, superfluously upholstered one, thy calories!"



So the unfortunate woman did buy herself a bathroom scale and abstain from all chow which was pleasing to the palate, spurning bread and butter and cheeses and creams and rich broths and lollipops and ice cream cones and French pastry. Whensoever she was hungry she would munch a leaf of lettuce or a reed of celery, and when thirsty she would drink lemon juice in huge quantities, making wry faces.

And lo! The flesh fell away like G. O. P. voters in a Tammany district, and she did grow as thin as a whippet and as ugly as a buzzard!

And she did don short skirts and flimsy drapings. And her husband, appraising her keenly on the highway one day in a bright light, did push her roughly into a taxicab and speed home with her, saying:

"Oh, my beloved, forget my recriminations, which were as the meaningless whinings of a south wind. Only promise that you will do as I say, oh, beloved, and never again will I imply dislike by even as much as the throwing of a finger bowl!"

Hearing this, and fearful of his earnestness, she did promise. And lo! He did rush out to the delicatessen and return with great baskets heaped with hot mince pies, and smoking Virginian hams, and mashed potatoes, gleaming with butter, and jelly rolls, and white bread, and choice jams, and honey from the Orient, and firkins of butter, and great tanks of pure cream. And behind him came twelve black waseefs rolling barrels of granulated sugar.

And there followed plumbers who installed a soda fountain and a taffypulling machine in the kitchenette.

And her husband did command her to eat. And when she protested he did slap her across the ear with a great floor board, saying:

"Thou promised!"

So the woman did eat, and daily did the husband go into the market place and return with great stocks of carbonaceous foodstuffs until she was soon tipping the scales at two hundred.

And they did live happily, the man holding that at that weight she was the lesse of two evils.



## Let's Talk It Over!

*A Public Conference in Which the Editor  
Humbly Repeats What the Readers Say.  
All Are Respectfully Invited to Hurl a  
Brickbat or Toss a Bouquet*

Los Angeles, California.

You ask in your current number for votes on the stories. Well, "A South Sea Tragedy" is too disgusting for words—a man reverencing a cannibal who had cooked and eaten the former's

wife! In another story the hero gorges himself with hot cakes to become "The World's Champion." I would hate to read this if I were the least bit seasick.

Most respectfully yours,

V. H. B.

Miami, Florida.

Please give us more humor. We like E. K. Means, Ellis Parker Butler, and Richard Howells Watkins. The July MUNSEY had a wildly fantastic but highly amusing sketch about a fake cannibal in the South Seas. You misnamed it a "tragedy." "The World's Champion" was another misleading title. We nearly skipped this funny one because we dislike prize fight stories. Man, either of us could eat more buckwheat cakes than that young fellow did!

Very truly yours,

A. L. J. and R. S.

Tucson, Arizona.

As one who knows his Mexico, let me thank you for the fine story about the bullfight in the July MUNSEY. Now let us have a Mexican's reactions to an American prize fight.

Cordially,

Sgt. B. G. S.

Bellevue, Washington State.

"A Mexican Bullfight" is a revolt-

ing article, unworthy of your magazine.

F. M. S.

Chicago, Illinois.

Gilbert T. Hodges did a real good job. In fact, it is the best view of a bullfight I ever read.

E. J. R.

Maywood, California.

I have been a reader of MUNSEY's for many years, and in my opinion it has fallen off badly in the last few months.

Mrs. W. P.

Boise, Idaho.

I like the new MUNSEY. You have gone right up to the head of the class in live fiction. Come on with your "Wildcats!" and your "Craters!" I like my fiction full of pep.

Miss H. B. J.

Bristol, Pennsylvania.

Give us more stories like "The Golden Brute," by George F. Worts, or some good comedy. I think MUNSEY is the best magazine published.

J. B.

**THE READER'S TURN!** Please vote Yes or No with an X in the proper square, and kindly mail the coupon for our editorial guidance.

## THE READER'S BALLOT

**BALLOT EDITOR:**—*Munsey's Magazine*, 280 Broadway, New York.

I hereby cast my vote for, or against, the stories in the **SEPTEMBER MUNSEY**.

|                                     | YES   | NO    |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Something to Think About.....       | [...] | [...] |
| Lady Tenderfoot .....               | [...] | [...] |
| The Faith Healer.....               | [...] | [...] |
| A Major Operation.....              | [...] | [...] |
| The Invisible Girl.....             | [...] | [...] |
| The "Old Maid" of Dunder Falls..... | [...] | [...] |
| Forage .....                        | [...] | [...] |
| The Triumph of Thomasine.....       | [...] | [...] |
| Black Shadow .....                  | [...] | [...] |
| Cave Man .....                      | [...] | [...] |
| Darling of the Race Track.....      | [...] | [...] |
| "Dynamic Detroit" .....             | [...] | [...] |
| A Land of Dreams.....               | [...] | [...] |
| Bob Davis Recalls.....              | [...] | [...] |
| The Jazzarabian Nights.....         | [...] | [...] |
| The Crater .....                    | [...] | [...] |

Reader's name.....Address.....



# LOOKING THRU MUNSEY'S

For OCTOBER

---

## SPOTLIGHT!

*By*

Ellen Hogue and Jack Bechdolt

The colorful story of a vaudeville family who forsook the stage for an easy life on an isolated farm. Here is a real treat for readers who know the lure of big time acts, patter talk, eccentric dances, acrobats—and the trained seals.

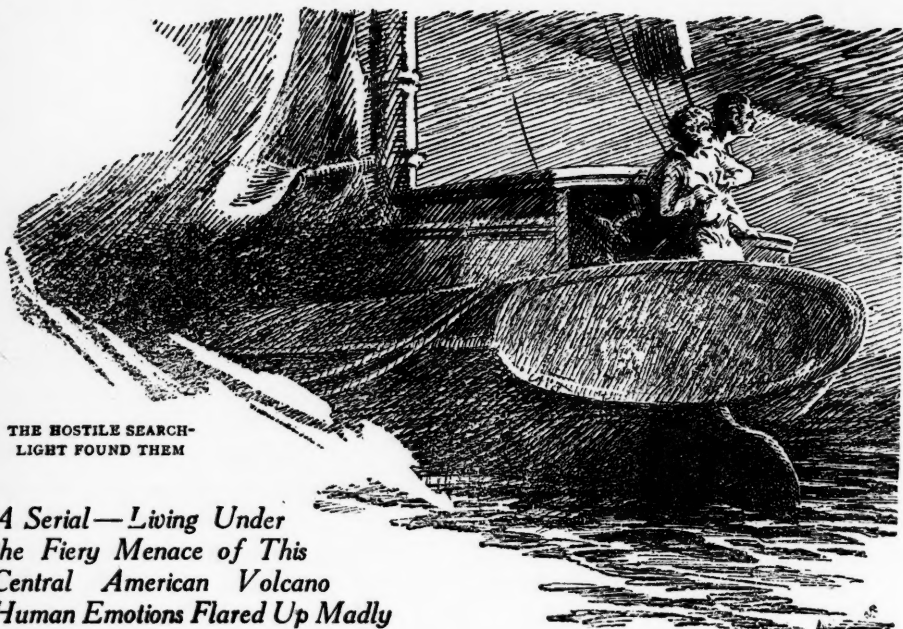
---

*The final installment of "Lady Tenderfoot," a modern Western romance by George F. Worts, and the usual quota of excellent short stories and articles, will complete the*

## OCTOBER MUNSEY

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS-STANDS

Thursday, September 20th



THE HOSTILE SEARCH-  
LIGHT FOUND THEM

*A Serial—Living Under  
the Fiery Menace of This  
Central American Volcano  
Human Emotions Flared Up Madly*

# The Crater

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of "Queen of the Night," "The Starlit Trail," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS REVIEWED

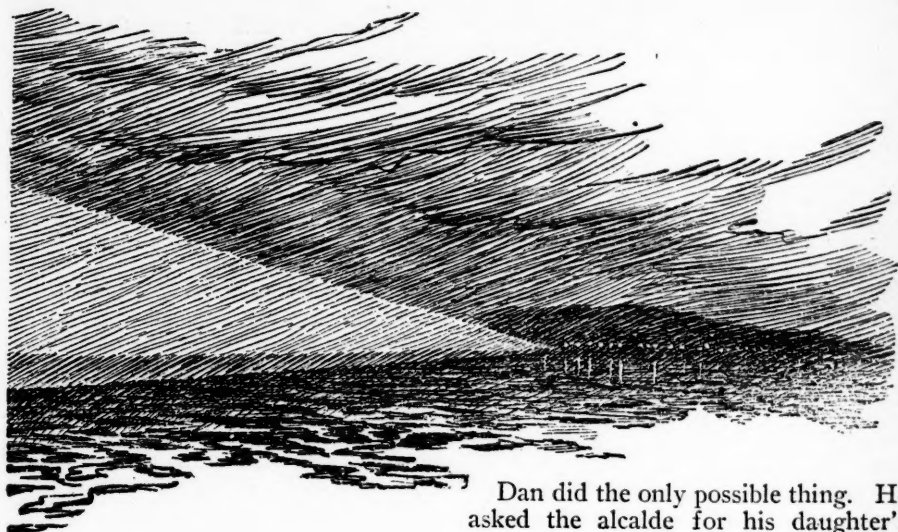
**I**N Todos Santos, it is said, most anything can happen. Overshadowed by El Capitan, that smoldering volcano, which at any time might erupt and bury the little Central American city under a bed of lava, the citizens lived with the abandon of those who realize that each day might be the last of work, each night the last of pleasure.

The gayety at the Casino was at its pinnacle when two American brothers, Dan and Tertius Gregory, with two hours on their hands before their boat sailed for the States, approached the alcalde of the province, Señor Hidalgo,

grandee of the purest Latin blood, with a letter of introduction from their father, whose youth had been spent in industrial developments around Todos Santos.

At once the old aristocrat, a lean, vulturelike creature, offered them their choice of all the Casino afforded. To Tertius, the younger, it meant the gaming room, and he was soon lost in the fever of play, with his brother's warning words forgotten.

To Dan it meant—the Señorita Dolores Hidalgo. She epitomized all his dreams of what a Spanish woman should be. Dancing with her, the subtle southern warmth entered his senses, and when she led him to the veranda he was a man bewitched.



The haunting rhythm of the orchestra, the sensuous tropical night, the undertone of the breaking surf, and the olive-skinned girl at his side, beguiling away his senses with the veiled flame in her eyes, swept Dan headlong into the passionate spirit of Todos Santos. And then he was holding her in his arms, covering her face with kisses.

It was like awakening from a dream when the proprietor called him, frantically urging him to the gaming room. Still dazed, it took but a moment for the tragedy there to arouse him to its consequences. Tertius had caught a player cheating; he accused the man; and in self defense he had fired—and he was a shot who never missed.

As it happened the cheater was the son of a wealthy planter, and the corporal of the constabulary was anxious for the acclaim of arresting an Americano. There were plenty of witnesses ready to swear that Tertius Gregory had deliberately killed the Latin. When Dan made a vain attempt to bribe the guards he knew his beloved younger brother was doomed to face a firing squad.

Dan did the only possible thing. He asked the alcalde for his daughter's hand in marriage. So eager was the old grandee for an alliance which would promote his trade with America and bring the commercial methods of the United States to his own interests, that he announced the engagement immediately to those assembled in the Casino. It was a simple matter then to get young Tertius safely on the boat and out of the country.

And there was Dan facing a new life in Central America—engaged to a woman he did not love and hardly knew. One complication threatened the smoothness of even that course: Pasqual Hidalgo, the scapegrace son of the alcalde, knew that Dan was marrying his sister to save Tertius, and Pasqual was to use this knowledge for his own advantage.

Immense plans were made for a magnificent wedding, which was to symbolize the alliance between the United States and the little Central American republic. On the day of the ceremony, which the town was marking by a festival, Dan presented himself at the office of his friend, Peter Stinson, American consul, who was to act as best man.

He was confronted with Meg Cam-

eron, an American girl, just in from the tropical jungle to seek aid to complete an expedition for buried urns. She was the sole survivor of her party. Gregory felt an immediate response between this girl and himself, and as much as he wanted to be the rescuer, he relinquished the honor to Stinson.

At the church, while he was waiting for the bishop to enter from the opposite side, Dan Gregory was made the recipient of as strange a bit of knowledge as ever reached a bridegroom. Doña Dolores's old nurse confided that the *señorita* was becoming his bride out of obedience to her father: her heart had been given to a local youth.

That information freed Dan from his bond. He fled, leaving his alarmed best man, Consul Stinson, and took his place at the rendezvous with Meg Cameron. And when the enraged alcalde located him, he was on Meg's boat off the coast, trying in vain to get out to sea.

Poor old Stinson, overcome by the excitement, heard this news from his clerk, who announced that Señor Hidalgo had ordered out a squad to bring back the runaway bridegroom. To expunge the stain on his Castilian honor he was to have the young American shot at the feet of the jilted bride.

The story continues:

## CHAPTER XII

### PURSUIT



LOUDS had gathered, shutting out the moonlight for a space of time.

The gale had blown itself out. Those northers were in the habit at this time of the year of puffing away steadily, throbbing like a toothache, then abruptly dying down, only to start up again with redoubled vigor toward early morning.

When this happened a curious change came over that old sloop which Meg Cameron was trying to steer

through the entrance of the lagoon. The cranky vessel seemed to lose her spirit.

Obstinate as a mule but a few minutes before, she now wallowed along, the sails hanging dejectedly like wet blankets, the mainsheet sagging until it struck the water, sending a few lazy sparks of phosphorescence trailing aft.

The jib and staysail flapped a bit, their sheets falling dead on the deck. A huge black porpoise which had been playing about the prow, gave up in disgust at the craft's laziness, and headed off like a torpedo for the mouth of the lagoon.

And everything else seemed to be heading for the mouth of the lagoon likewise — bits of floating kelp, hyacinths from the river, blobs of oil from the piers, flotsam from the beach. The fact of the matter was that the tide was running out strong.

The two fugitives, standing at the wheel, and wondering just what fate was in store for them now that they were becalmed, turned and looked at each other.

The girl laughed. "I kept her near the mouth, just waiting for this," she said.

"Waiting for what?" Dan asked.

"For that gale to blow out. The old tub hasn't any fight left in her now."

With the faint, almost imperceptible steerageway that the boat had, as a left over from her last merry race across the lagoon, Meg turned the bow seaward just opposite to the channel. The tide was running stronger here than anywhere else. The boat, moving along so that she headed for a point across her starboard bow, drifted into the mouth of the lagoon.

She kept on drifting, keeping the slow pace set by the kelp and hyacinths. She came to the Santa Cruz Light, and Dan confidently expected that the sea devil which had possessed her would again balk. But not a tremor went through her timbers as she passed



those weed-slimed battlements. She was inert, docile, as spiritless as an old rotten log, drifting at an angle down a current.

Then, as the tower of coral rocks, cement, and ancient whitewashed walls moved slowly behind them, Dan and the girl felt the craft give a sudden shudder.

She was dipping to the first breaker on the bar.

There was a groan as of a helpless sort of rage. The stays squeaked piteously, and as the hull rolled slightly to the long swell the boom came to life and swept across the deck with an angry and baffled roar.

A short while later they were well out in the sea, under the black shadow of the clouds. In that immensity of soundlessness and dark it seemed as if they were suspended midway between sky and water, without making the slightest movement. But looking back over the stern they saw, by the long line of lights which marked Todos Santos, that the old boat was still drifting along with the ebb.

They waited, it seemed, for an eternity, hoping that the gale would start blowing again. It was not an eternity. They had drifted for scarcely more than twenty minutes before they heard a familiar sound punctuating the deathly stillness—a soft *chug-chug* of a motor far away in the direction of the surf.

Dan felt the girl grip his arm. He tried to reassure her, drew her to him, and felt the pounding of her heart.

The rhythm of the motor grew louder, pervading the darkness all about them, coming across the black, smooth surface of the sea, as if from every direction. A few moments later the sound was deafening—a violent *put-put*, a sputter, a bang of backfiring that seemed to echo back from the distant precipices of the land. There might have been ten motor boats chasing them, if they could judge by that infernal racket.

Then came a dim streak of illumination leaping across the water, a straight white band sweeping in big arcs for a good mile. The spotlight hitting the glassy sea sent up a bright green reflection which scudded along the surface this way and that, reaching as far as the breakers at El Capitan's base, sweeping back again like a slender, limitless pendulum, until it flashed with a sudden brilliance across the inert sails of Meg Cameron's sloop.

Immediately the band of light stopped sweeping the breast of the sea and focused itself with a cruel glare upon the patched brown sails, the stays, the taffrail, and the wheel. There were the two fugitives, silhouetted as they clutched each other and stared like two blinking owls into the light.

From across the water came the distant shout of voices. A bullet whizzed down the straight path of light almost simultaneous with the bark of a gun. The slug shot up a spurt of white water fifty feet from the sloop's stern.

Dan broke free from the girl's excited grip.

"Little bit too far for a revolver," he said. "I'll let 'em come closer. Meanwhile," he added, "you stay below till I've finished with 'em."

The girl dashed to the hatchway, disappeared down the ladder, and a moment later thrust up her arm, holding a rifle.

Gregory looked across the rail to that dot of light. All except the straight path of illumination from the motor boat was pitch dark. Dan might have been in a shooting gallery with the target a glittering coin down there at the end of an arcade.

Standing in a circle like an actor in a spotlight, he put the rifle to his shoulder.

Before he fired, several shots spurted in the water, one a few yards aft of the stern, another zipping across the bowsprit, two others splashing in the water a dozen yards or so in front of him.

Aiming at the spotlight he took one shot.

From a distance that seemed like miles came the simultaneous crack of glass, the burst of a globe, then absolute darkness.

A succession of clear Spanish oaths came across the water as if from eight different throats. This was followed by a fusillade of shots, winks of light, the barks of guns. But where those shots landed Dan had no way of knowing. It was quite obvious that, aimed into the pitch dark, they went far astray.

Meg Cameron came up on deck. The two stood there waiting for another eternity, while again there was no indication of the whereabouts of their pursuers except the loud *chug-chug* of the motor, the occasional sputter and back fire, a sound that came from all points of the compass.

Now the reverberation came from a good distance astern. Now it was closer. Now it shifted to the quarter. Then as if the distant precipices of the island volcano were making a sounding board, it seemed that the motor boat was crossing athwart their bow on the El Capitan side.

The two fugitives realized soon enough what was happening: the motor boat was circling about them at a distance of perhaps a hundred yards, perhaps a furlong. As their eyes dilated to the darkness, Meg and Dan Gregory could make out the low uneven mass of black, with a streak of phosphorescence astern, moving rapidly across the water.

It was silhouetted for a few moments against the lights of Todos Santos, then more dimly against the moonlit sky of the horizon, then snuffed out altogether against the jet black mass of El Capitan.

For a space of time the pursuers kept up this maneuvering, coming a little closer on each round toward the sloop. There was no doubt but that they could see the sloop as clearly,

more clearly, than the two fugitives could see them. From time to time they let out a volley of shots, one or two random bullets zipping through the canvas.

Dan did not return the fire. He had great faith in the psychological effect of firing only when he was sure of making a hit. And a few minutes later the time came for him to impress this bit of psychology on them with a vengeance.

In an astonishing burst of radiance the moon peeped over the cloud mass high above the jagged volcano of El Capitan.

Immediately the two boats were revealed in a glittering expanse of silver water.

Every man on board the motor boat, except the helmsman, emptied his gun in a frantic fire. The shots were close enough to be dangerous. They punctured the sails, splintered across the rail, dug into the mast and booms.

Dan shoved the girl forcibly into the safety of the hatch, and then ducked behind the protection of the mast.

The pursuers made one more circle, and eliciting no reply to their continuous fire, they must have had the impression that Dan had been hit.

With a sudden flare of Latin courage, they ordered their helmsman, who was at the boat's wheel and therefore in most danger, to stand in closer to the sloop.

The latter turned his wheel and headed straight for the sloop without decreasing speed.

From behind the protection of the mast Dan fired again, the easiest shot that he ever remembered in his life. It was so easy that he picked the very spot on the helmsman in which to wound him, the slug cutting into the flesh of the breed's right arm.

The victim fell, with a piteous cry as if he had been shot to death.

The corporal, who was directly behind him, jumped for the wheel. By that time they were within scarcely

twenty yards of the sloop.

"Don't touch that wheel, you!" Dan cried in Spanish, "or I'll fire again."

The corporal had barely had a chance to turn the wheel a few spokes, when this order gripped him like a galvanic current, and he dropped to the bottom boards, crouching in terror.

Behind him his men were loading their guns, firing wild, and dropping to their knees in utter panic as they saw themselves bearing down head on to the sloop.

It all happened in a few seconds. The wheel had been turned sufficiently to send the prow a few points to port, but it was not sufficient to avoid a collision.

She hit the sloop a little forward of midships, and being by far the lighter of the two vessels, she took the whole force of the bump herself. A crash, a lurch to port, and every man on board of her was sent hurtling. There was a ludicrous jumble of guns thrown from hands, of sombreros, of legs and arms, of heads knocking against the gunwale.

When the boat listed back, bumped again, then righted herself the squad of soldiers looked up to the tall, looming figure of a man. He was standing up there at the rail of the sloop and covering them with a revolver. Beside him was a girl who now held that fatal rifle, which she was leveling at the open boat.

The motor was still chugging vociferously. No one had thought of shutting it off. Indeed, if there had been time to do anything, their first impulse would have been to give the craft more speed. To stop her under the fire of that murderous Americano was the last thing in the world a single man on board would have done.

The boat bumped along, nosing into the big sloop like a tug warping a ship to a dock. As she began to gather way, she crept alongside up to the prow and there the broken searchlight got afoul of the martingale and stays.

Gregory had followed the boat forward, and when he saw that she was foul, he ordered the dazed and terror-stricken soldiers to hand up their guns, butts foremost.

Not a man disobeyed. That long range shot that had hit their searchlight was still vivid in their memory. Likewise their helmsman was lying on the bottom boards making a dramatic exhibition of his wound with groans and prayers to the saints.

As soon as he was convinced that he had a boatload of disarmed men, Gregory ordered them to throw him a stern line to get clear of the martingale, and then keep going.

He let them get a boat's length forward of the bowsprit before making the line fast. Then the big sloop feeling the tug, began to gather way. Gregory stood up forward, watching his prisoners and warning them that should they be so rash as to cast off the line he would have time to kill every man jack of them before they could get out of range.

They got well under way, the tow rope now taut, now sagging and dragging smirches of light along the smooth water. They headed north-east out toward the glittering moonlit horizon.

For hours they chugged along in the dead calm.

The moon crossed over to the Cordilleras, then went down, leaving them once again in a black sea which was as smooth as a mill pond. The morning star came up over the port quarter, retaining its blue, unwinking radiance while the sky behind turned blood red.

The sun found the same strange scene: a squad of soldiers with their straw sombreros tipped to the back of their heads, their eyes turned aft and glowering venomously at a lumbering sloop, full-rigged, but with sagging sails, obediently following the towline.

Up there at the prow, six feet above them, stood the towering figure of a man in stiff shirt front and black trou-

sers, still holding a revolver and puffing at a cheroot. Way aft, so that they could see little else but her tawny, uncombed hair, was the girl at the wheel keeping the sloop on the course the motor boat was setting.

At seven o'clock in the morning the gale sprung up again. It came in fitful gusts at first, filling the sails with a loud creak of boom, jib boom, and gaff, a rattle of blocks, a straining of stays. Then the blow settled down to a steady norther, the sloop heeling over comfortably, steadying herself and piling up a bow wave.

Thus she came alongside of the boat that had been towing her.

Dan Gregory lifted his six-gun, aiming between the shoulders of two of the terrified prisoners.

"He will kill us all now!" they cried.

Dan fired. A neat, round hole appeared a few inches above the bottom of the gas tank which was up in the forward works.

"You'll have enough gasoline to get back to land, unless you try to chase us," Gregory said.

He told the girl to get something for the wounded man. She went below and came back with a jug of rum, which she tossed down to them.

Dan cast off the towing line, and immediately the motor boat swung off. The sloop, with her mainsheet paid off, fell away and gathered speed, sailing before the wind. The motor boat, after describing a big circle, headed for the long line of purple sierras, which was San Sebastian.

There was no doubt whatsoever about their intention. They had had enough of these two Americanos. Besides, what could they do now that they had lost their precious rifles?

Dan turned aft to the girl. "Which way now, skipper?"

She pointed to the southeast, to the giant crater that shut out half the horizon.

"El Capitan?" he exclaimed. "Then

why were we making them tow us up toward Honduras?"

"To get enough northing so we can run down before the wind. It's the quickest way, and every moment's precious. In fact, if it hadn't been for this motor boat towing us I'm afraid we'd have got to the island and found the treasure gone."

## CHAPTER XIII

### DOOMED



EL CAPITAN was a mountain of Jurassic limestone, as flat as a mesa except for the jagged peak at the northern end which was the crater.

A narrow lagoon, almost like a river, filled the bottom of a precipitous cañon on the western side. A fort built when San Sebastian was a captaincy general under Mexico, still stood at the mouth of the lagoon; but because of the distance of the island from the mainland, its strategical value was found to be very slight.

Besides this, time and the gales had worked havoc upon its mortar and rock walls, the cells were taken over by poisonous snakes and vampires, the battlements by sea gulls, and the stone tower by vultures. Palm and calabash trees and bamboo had crowded the landward side, all but smothering the crumbling walls.

Shortly before the sails of the sloop, Chita, appeared on the deep blue surface of the Caribbean, a peculiar drama was coming to its climax on this island.

Two men were working feverishly up there at the landward point of the lagoon. Here where the placid water reached a beach of pumice stone, they were bearing heavy burdens, trudging hour by hour from some point high up in the plateau, down to where the cañon bottom became the lagoon.

One of these men was a hulking, half-breed Carib, with hair like a horse's mane, bushy eyebrows like a



monkey's, a single little red eye, broken discolored teeth.

He came down the trail, dragging at the end of a rope a tablet on which was written a calendar in some ancient Mayan symbols. The tablet, although not large, made deep grooves in the saw grass and sand as it was drawn along. It must have been of tremendous weight. But just what the metal was you could not tell, because of the thick incrustations of mud and slime.

Behind this ungainly laborer came another, much slighter figure, a man with a pointed ratlike face, and cavernous little eyes that kept a jealous watch on his giant companion. This was Pasqual, the beloved son of Hidalgo.

And the burden he was dragging across the sandy beach was some heavy mud cased metal also. It was a vessel carved, it seemed, with idols of greenish mud. Quetzals, curious squares, and the swastica symbol could be barely made out.

It was said that a drama was coming to its climax. You could tell this by the eager watchfulness of the frail, rat-eyed man behind, and the furtive glances of the clumsy, bestial hulk in front. Every now and then, as they came down the long trail, the latter would stop, wipe his sweating corrugated forehead with his hand, and look behind him with a fearful look as if he expected something to leap upon his massive shoulders.

It would be hard at first to understand just why a powerful brute like this half-breed Carib would be so fearful of that wisp of a thing behind him. The explanation is this:

They had found gold enough to build a city—yes, to build ten cities like Todos Santos. But it was not enough gold to divide between two men. One man must get all.

That was half the explanation. The other half was the simple fact that the smaller man carried something which at the time was considerably more

precious than that weighty tablet or that urn: he was carrying a revolver.

The two men did not transport their burdens quite as far as the water's edge. Instead they left them in the waist high guinea grass, where it would have been impossible for any eye in that desolate demesne to find them, except the eyes of the vultures circling up there by the fuming crater of El Capitan in the clouds.

In the grass there was a heap of what looked like half buried pieces of junk, dripping with slimy water, entangled with green scum, each article thickly incased in mud. There were urns, plates, tablets, richly carved globes, swords, their blades thick with rust, their handles studded with mud lumps that were like wasps' nests, but that might have been jewels.

At a fallen mahogany tree, stretching out into the water, there was moored a thirty-foot launch with a dirty awning of striped red and white, and rattan deck furniture with cretonne covered pillows. She had a tattered San Sebastian flag at the stern and the Hidalgo flag on her mast. Typical of the pleasure craft you will find in those waters, her metal was rusty, her hull covered with barnacles, her paint blistered by the tropic sun.

Needless to say, the destination for that pile of mud-covered "junk" was the hold of this launch. But the two laborers did not immediately stow their freight on board, for then one of the two might double cross the other and put out to sea with the treasure. The safest way was to hide their freight in the guinea grass until they were ready to leave the island.

The clumsy, one-eyed mozo was thinking hard. Although streaming with sweat at his task, he was thinking much harder than he was working.

"This devil of a *maestro* won't give me any of the treasure," he thought. "He promises me half, which is a lunacy if ever there was one. He won't give me one peso—not one of

these plates, not one of these battle-axes or spears with the jewels on them.

"But," he mused, "I could perhaps slip a goblet into my shirt, and thus pay for all the guaro brandy I could drink for the rest of my life. I would go off to some Carib village and lie in a hut under a palm and sleep away my life. Once in awhile I would wake and take more guaro.

"That's all I want. That is not much to ask. But would he give me that much? *Por Dios*, no! Not this devil of a *maestro*.

"I might hide two goblets in my shirt, and after changing them for pesos, I could marry another Carib woman and live down by Armadillo River. It would be fun to have two wives—one at Todos Santos and the other down by the river. And yet that would keep me busy going from one place to another. I would want a boat, something like this one, with flags and awnings. Perhaps three goblets."

He wiped the sweat from his one good eye. "Three goblets? No. I believe it would be more fun just to lie on the beach and drink guaro. No worry. No bickering with a woman. Just sleeping and drinking. Not much to ask. But will he grant that?"

"*Santa Maria*, he will not! He will kill me. If I load myself down with this treasure in my shirt, my sombrero, my trousers, he will take it back after I am dead. And what he leaves after stripping me the vultures up there will take.

"Here we go for our last trip up in the hills. He will shoot me when I bring down the last load. When I'm through slaving for him and piling this treasure in the grass, he will take my life. One trip more. An hour's journey up there to that banana grove at the top of the cañon. Only a little hour!"

The other man had paused at the lagoon's edge, cooled his spindle wrists in the transparent water, dabbed some drops on his copper-colored brow.

He was careful to stay a good five

yards or so from his servant. He would take no chances on the latter's leaping upon him. There would not be much to a fight of that sort. He must keep his distance, a distance sufficient to give him time enough to draw and fire.

They started up the cañon <sup>the big</sup> the last trip to the cenote <sup>the</sup> well in the jungle.

And now Pasqual H dalgo was thinking:

"This man knows I am going to kill him."

And it frightened him. His heart pounded heavily as they made that upward climb. The big-bone mozo was scrambling up over lava banks, brushing through the tall guinea grass, shouldering his way past tangle of vines and bushes in the bamboos at the cañon's head.

Pasqual followed, far enough for safety, and yet close enough to prevent the giant mozo from making a sudden dash for liberty into the brush.

"It will take two of us to haul that next tablet down," Pasqual was saying to himself. "After that I can hoist it aboard with a block and tackle. But I must put nothing aboard until this man is killed. If I do, some one might find my boat and make away with her.

"Perhaps this mozo might get aboard and escape with all the treasure. No, I must kill him first. Then, when I am sure there is no one about, I will stow the treasure on board and sail down the coast.

"I will never go back to Todos Santos. Oh, no! Not enough to do there for the richest man in the world. I will go to Rio, or perhaps to Buenos Aires. I will buy a palace and keep twenty servants and a stable with a hundred thoroughbred horses. I will buy race horses. I will multiply my wealth with them.

"I will buy a real yacht, not a shabby old water-logged thing like this launch my father lets me run around in. I will buy a steam yacht and dress

myself with white trousers and a blue coat with gold braid on it.

"I will be loved by every woman who sets eyes on me. No doubt about that. I am handsome, and fabulously rich. No woman will be able to resist my braid. *Por Dios*, I own the whole already! But let me kill this mozo first."

They came up to the edge of the plateau where the brush grew sparser, and there were big stretches of granite and porphyry covered with ash and lava. A furlong away a basin of sediment had been washed down from the slopes of El Capitan. A grove of mahogany, banana, and rubber trees grew here thickly tangled with vines. This was the sacred grove in which, centuries before the Mayans had built their sacrificial well.

A wild chatter of parrots and monkeys greeted the return of the two laborers.

"He knows I am going to kill him this trip," Pasqual said to himself. "I must look out. A man is apt to be desperate when he knows he is doomed, and when he has only one executioner, instead of a whole firing squad. I must stay farther away this trip. I will stay well behind him."

The half-breed cyclops was carrying a block and tackle.

"Get down there in the well and make this rope fast to the chest," Pasqual ordered.

The mozo obeyed as if, being in a trance, he were subject to the slightest word of a hypnotist. He climbed over the vine-covered edge of the well like an automaton. One glance over his shoulder with that little red eye, and a shudder went through him.

"Yes," he said to himself, "he will kill me at the end of this trip."

He swung down into the darkness below, hand below hand, his huge bare feet clamping themselves together about the thick vine trunk at times, his breath coming in grunts from the flat nose. He was precisely like a giant

gorilla swinging down into a cave.

"He might leave me in this well. But that would do no good. He would have to cut too many vines, or else I would climb up and escape. He might hurl a boulder on my head. But he can't stone me, it is too dark.

"No, he will wait until I have dragged this chest to the launch, and then he'll kill me. And he knows I know he will kill me. He will be very careful this time."

Once in the dank, putrid smelling bottom of the cenote, the terrified man ape stood irresolutely with the end of the rope in his hand, the chest at his feet.

They had already broken the chest. It was filled with gold coins, a sacrifice of a whole nation's treasury, a sacrifice to the god Mam who lived under the volcano and who made the earth shake when he turned in his sleep.

The mozo still stood there as if dazed. Only a few moments of life left now. He would like to prolong it. Life down there in that cold, evil smelling place, with his legs knee-deep in crawling slime, was very pleasant compared to the unknown darkness into which he was soon to pass.

The lock of the chest had been broken open, and the mozo had seen the dull glow of green slimed gold in it. It was like a heap of coals buried under ashes. He might have filled his pockets with handfuls of them, and the devil up there, poking his sharp nose over the rim of the well and peering down at him, would not have seen the gesture.

But for some reason or other the mozo did not touch the hoard. It meant no more to him than the very stuff it looked like, burning coals under ashes. Perhaps he felt that his clumsy paws would have been burned if he thrust them into the pile.

Perhaps he was not thinking of that immeasurable wealth at all: he was probably thinking only of the eternal coals of fire that were to be his bed

when his maestro sent him to his death.

At any rate, stupidly, automatically, slowly, he pressed the rusty lid back into place, made the rope fast, and then turned his crimson eye upward.

There were the two rat's eyes gazing down at him.

"Not yet. He will want me to haul this weight up to the outside world. He will make me haul it to the boat, then with block and tackle he can get it aboard himself. He will have no one to help him then. I will be dead then."

Slowly he swung himself up to the edge of the well, and the pointed head vanished. When the mozo got up to the ground level, he gazed around, blinking at the brilliant flecks of sunlight that filtered through the grove. His *maestro* had sneaked off to a distance of twenty yards. He was taking no chance this time!

"Haul it up," Pasqual ordered.

The mozo started to bend his tremendous strength to his end of the tackle. It came up a few feet bit by bit, and snubbing the line around a trunk, the giant waited to regain his breath.

"I need help, *maestro*," he said. It had occurred to him that if Pasqual would approach and lend a hand on that line there might be a slim chance of making a wild rush at him. He had not drawn his gun. It would take a good part of a second. In a second a man might leap several feet. Before the gun was fired he might leap several feet farther. But—

"I have strained my shoulder," Pasqual said. "You must do what remains of the work."

"It is as I thought," the mozo said to himself, puffing and breathing as if with terrified grunts. "He knows that I know. He is afraid to approach me. He will stay a good way off."

And that is the way they went down the cañon. The mozo dragging the heavy chest along the ground, the rope over his massive shoulder, his head

bent, his one eye focused fearfully upon the ash piles or grass at his feet. Not once did he turn to look at the man twenty or thirty yards in the brush behind him. One look backward and he was assured he could be killed.

Down in the cañon bed the big breed stopped. He looked longingly toward the blue water, at the gaudy little launch, at the mouth of the inlet, fringed with coco palms, and rippling to snow white streaks where there was a bar. His gaze went still farther toward the purple mountains of the mainland which seemed to him like a sort of paradise—forever forbidden to him.

He stopped, his massive chest heaving with his work. But he did not dare to look around. He knew that the man following him had stopped likewise, for there was not a sound back there in the brush except for the whir of locusts, the squawk of a parrot.

When he resumed his toil, Pasqual Hidalgo waited a moment or two. Pasqual was frightened. It took nerve to do this, to fire at a man who knew he was doomed. If Pasqual could only have masked his intention, and then, without a single warning, like a bolt from the sky, if he could have hurled his gunshots at the luckless *hombre*, it would have been far easier.

As it was now, he felt that his victim had eyes in his tremendous back. He feared that the moment he drew his gun the mozo would turn and make a rush, a leap, like a wolf at bay.

For that reason Pasqual stayed back another ten yards.

His caution, or you might call it his cowardice, gave his victim an advantage.

The mozo came to a narrow barranca, or ravine, in the cañon bottom, where once a torrent had gouged its path to a lower level of the bed. It was heavily choked with jaragua grass as high as a man's shoulder. Here for



a moment the doomed cyclops was out of sight.

Pasqual did not hasten to the ravine to keep his eye on his victim. He was afraid. The giant mozo might have crouched in that grass and sprung out of it like a jack-in-the-box. Instead, Pasqual waited, resolving not to advance a step closer until the mozo could be seen coming out of the barranca on the lower level of the cañon bed.

But, before emerging, the giant paused. His ear was attuned now to that one sound, of his pursuer breaking through the cane and brush behind him during that long journey down the cañon. And now his ear warned him that Pasqual was again standing still, waiting.

Perhaps he would fire when the mozo came out of the grass clumps. Perhaps he would fire farther down there when his victim was out in the open ash beds. Perhaps farther still when he was dragging the chest to the piled-up hoard at the water's edge.

There were two furlongs of heavy trudging, and then would come the preordained event: several shots in the giant back. Why wait for that? Why cling to two or three more minutes of life? Why not invite his fate now, when there was a hundredth chance that he might escape the pursuing bullets?

Having paused, the chest which he was dragging at the end of twenty feet of rope remained motionless up there at the top of the barranca. Even though the mozo was deeply ensconced in the tall grass, the chest was still visible.

Pasqual saw it, and when it ceased moving across the ground, it frightened him. There was no doubt now but that the mozo was going to wait there in ambush.

But this was not the case at all. Instead of waiting, the big giant dropped the rope from his shoulder, crouched low, and made a desperate rush down the cañon.

When he came out into the open, his pursuer saw him, and with a surprised, gasping cry, drew his six-gun.

Breaking into a run, Pasqual fired rapidly at the hulking figure plunging along there like a mad bull through the cane and brush and between tree trunks, and across long stretches of sand.

Six wild shots, all of which, because of the distance, failed to make a hit. Then Pasqual fumbled for more cartridges as he ran.

The desperate fugitive ran faster.

He ran in leaps and bounds, hurdling across fallen mahogany trunks, tearing wildly through the tangle of vines and cane, crashing through a bed of orchids, wallowing like a wild boar through a morass of slime and hyacinths.

He did not pause when he reached the shore. He might have stooped to pick up one relic of the past which could have assured his future as a rich man, but he did not. He would not lose this race like the famed Atlanta stooping to pick up golden apples.

Like some blind terror-stricken monster he plunged out into the water, and by main force shoved the prow of the boat out into the stream, tearing the bowline from the limb of the overturned mahogany. Scrambling aboard, he threw himself with a wild frenzy at the engine, got it wheezing and coughing, and threw in the clutch.

This had given his pursuer time enough to come within range.

Just as the propeller started churning up a white foam, and the launch moved out into deep water, Hidalgo fired the one shot which he had loaded into his six-gun.

It zipped across the gunwale and lodged in the gigantic bull shoulders of the mozo as he was stumbling forward to the wheel.

He did not immediately fall, but staggered as if he had received a terrific blow from behind. Groping his way forward, he sagged to his knees,

his hairy fists clutched at the wheel, which for a moment supported him as he got the launch on her course.

Then he sank down to the deck, his head lolling forward on his great hairy chest. He could not see where he was going now.

He had the picture of the purple mountains in his eye, however, as the launch chugged on out of the mouth of the inlet onto the wide expanse of sea between El Capitan and the mainland sierras.

His last gesture was to thrust his brawny arm through the spokes and clutch the binnacle which was affixed to the bulwark in front of the wheel.

Thus his arm, which a few moments later was stiff, acted as a drawbar, keeping the wheel in place so that the craft kept her course.

Her course was due west toward the mainland sierras.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE MASTER



HE Chita, under full sail, was bearing down on the volcano island before a steady wind.

Her skipper, Meg Cameron, had given her all the canvas she could carry, even though the gale was freshening to a two-reef blow. There was no time to be lost. The two men who had followed her to the cenote would lose no time in transporting the treasure to their boat.

What sort of a craft they had she did not know. They had hidden the launch in the tules. But she knew that it would take many trips to their boat through a mile of dense jungles. It was a day's job.

Her fears now were focused on the dreadful possibility: had they completed their task? Had they left the island?

As the Chita ran down under the lee of the towering mountain, Meg ordered her companion to get below. He must not be seen. Her whole power lay

in the fact that he was an unknown quantity, lurking in the background ready for action when called for.

It would do no good for him to remain aboard. Pasqual would watch the sloop like a cat. He would watch every porthole as if watching for a mouse in a hole. He would take no possible chance. His very first supposition on seeing the sloop coming back would be that there was some one else on board besides the girl, perhaps several men ready to kill or torture him at the girl's bidding.

Thus it was that she decided to put Dan ashore as soon as she crossed the bar of the inlet.

She quartered across to the heavily wooded shore. As she approached the dense wall of bamboo and rubber and vines, she called down to her mate:

"I'll come about in a minute. When the boom swings, jump out on deck and dive overboard. You won't be seen. When you're on deck the sail will screen you on one side—the forest on the other. I'll sail on up to the end of the lagoon and go ashore. But don't let me out of your sight. After I'm ashore, keep following me, but never come from cover—until you see I need you."

She bore down on the dense overhanging growth of the shore as if to crash head on into it. But when a boat's length away she turned into the wind. The sails banged with a deafening roar as the boom swung across, its end crashing through a wide sweep of cane and young bamboo like a scythe. The old hull heaved groggily, steadied herself in the eye of the wind as the roaring sails became silent and filled away on the new tack.

Dan had leaped to the deck and heaved himself by the board with such agility that even the girl had failed to see him. On the instant, he was completely screened in the dense jungle of calabash trees, bamboos, cohune palms and creepers.

Again the girl quartered across the

inlet, paid out the sheet to slow her speed, and another tack brought her well up to the end of the lagoon. Here she turned into the wind, and when the sloop hung motionless, she eased her along a bit, approaching the beach. Then she ran forward and dropped a kedje as the keel rubbed in the ooze.

Immediately upon making the landing she ran her eye up and down the beach in search of some sign of human presence. The scene was a limitless expanse of dense jungle, towering precipices. Except for the ancient fort it looked as if no human being had ever set foot on the shore of that wilderness.

The squawk of a parrot, the senseless cry of a "howling monkey," the lonely croon of the norther in the sixty-foot cohune palms—that was all that broke the ominous hush. Had her two enemies escaped from the island with the treasure?

That was the one question that must be immediately answered. She must go up to that cenote.

Running with the speed of a deer through the bamboo groves, wading through the swamps of the cañon bottom, leaping nimbly across the beds of lilies and orchids, and climbing up the steep lava banks, she made the long ascent.

Dan Gregory did not let her out of his sight. As she climbed the gorge, he followed along the jungle covered shores of the inlet, and then, keeping constantly under cover, worked his way up the mountainside. At all times he stayed close enough to the cañon so that its bottomlands were clearly revealed below him.

Part of these events were witnessed by Pasqual Hidalgo, hiding well inland in a grove of tree sunflowers and wild cocoa.

He had seen the sloop stand in from the sea before a steady norther. The fact is she had sailed into the inlet scarcely an hour after Pasqual's launch, bearing her dying helmsman, had put

out, shaping a course due west for the mainland.

When Pasqual first sighted the big salt-rotted mainsail of the Chita, he dashed into the brush and then crawled inland to a vantage point from which he could await what should come to pass.

While crawling thus through the high jaragua grass, he had a partially obstructed view of the sloop making her first tack. He remembered that she tacked so far toward the opposite shore that her boom in swinging almost got foul of the bamboo.

This was the tack during which Dan Gregory dropped into the water and hid himself in the jungle.

Everything that happened thereafter was clearly seen by the eagle-eyed Pasqual—everything, that is to say, except the maneuvers of the man in the brush.

He saw the girl make the landing by herself. He saw her run up the beach. He saw her start the ascent to the plateau.

Now he saw her running up the cañon toward the sacred well alone.

Just what did this mean? Why did she not take the man or men she had summoned for help with her?

This confused Pasqual. He was certain that some one had come with her. She had been gone since afternoon of the preceding day. It was more than enough time to go to Todos Santos and back.

He recalled that there had been a long calm, but even taking that into consideration she could have made the journey. Beyond the shadow of a doubt there was some one on that sloop, ready to blaze away at Pasqual, in case he came within range.

One thing he was sure of: he would not take any chances with that sloop. That is, not yet. Later—when he got all the dreadful ramifications of this situation well analyzed, he would have to go to the sloop. He needed her. There was no other way to get off the island. And that sloop, with her com-

modious hold, which had once been used for maize and jute fiber and tobacco, was just the place to hide the treasure of the well.

And yet how could he dare to go down and board her?

Since the girl was running to the plateau rim alone, it might be supposed that after all she had brought no one back to the island with her. Perhaps she had reflected that she would have to divide the treasure, a possibility which, to Pasqual's avaricious way of thinking, was ridiculous. She had very likely returned with the desperate and foolhardy intention of fighting her own fight.

The possibility pleased Pasqual. He could handle her. He could get her aboard the sloop and sail away with her to Buenos Aires with the treasure.

The memory of her amber eyes and silken tawny hair began to burn within him. It was the primary cause of his following her to the island. He had seen her one day on the Todos Santos water front. The first sight was enough. He wanted her.

And now that he had the treasure right down there within a few yards of the sloop, hidden in the grass, the prospect of taking the girl along with him enthused him to a fever.

He shouldered his way through the grass and ran up a steep trail that was well hidden in a banana grove. He came up to the rim of the plateau a few minutes after the girl herself had climbed out of the cañon.

Meg Cameron was running across an open space of pumice stone and lava. She did not see Pasqual emerge from the thicket behind her. She did not even hear him.

As she reached the edge of the grove where the cenote was, she was aware for the first time of a shadow falling upon her. Footsteps had been echoing after her as she ran, and the memory of them flashed across her mind.

She whirled about with a scream.

Two rat's eyes were twinkling at

her. Lips were tightened across yellow teeth.

"Are you going for your treasure, *señorita*?"

Her blanched face colored again. She regained her breath. The terror in her eyes gave way to something else, something very near joy. It took but a moment for her fear to vanish and her triumph to show itself clearly in her face. Pasqual had not gone! Then the treasure was hers—to divide with her man!

She stood her ground, facing him with a calm, pale assurance, while Pasqual's eyes gleamed red, and his pointed nose twitched in a peculiar ratlike way, as if he were at once hungry and suspicious.

As Pasqual stared he came to the conclusion that she was beautiful, and that she was deadly.

Would it be safe to leap upon her? No! He stood where he was, crouching, grinning.

"*Señorita*," he said in a quiet, tense voice, "you're coming with me. We are going to sea, you and I together. The fortune is ours: we divide it, you and I. No, that beast of a mozo of mine will have not a peso of it.

"Why? Because he is dead. I killed him. But I'll not kill you. Oh, no! I have use for you. I want you! If I have you I own the whole world. You and I go to Buenos Aires on that sloop! We will live, *por Dios*, as no lovers have ever lived before!"

He leaned forward; then restrained himself suddenly, his scrawny copper colored hands opening, the fingers hooked.

There was a sound in the brush—a slow breaking of a twig as if an armadillo were prowling off there in the thicket.

Pasqual gasped as if he had been knifed in the back. He straightened up, his fragile head cocked in the attitude of listening. The low, receding forehead turned wet.

Then abruptly he whirled.



"Whom did you bring?" he barked out in a tense, voiceless ferocity.

"Bring?" she asked, smiling, taking advantage of his mental panic. "What do you mean 'bring'?"

"You brought some one back to kill me. Damn you for a cheat and liar! Here I make love to you and you want to kill me!"

"You say I brought some one back to divide that treasure with? Must I divide it again?"

"Yes, with your men hiding there in the brush! If I make a move I'll be dropped. You want to see me shot down dead at your feet!"

She paled. It was not a very pleasant situation for a woman, to have a man killed before her eyes.

"For your own good I want to tell you: don't touch me! Don't come near me!" There was no doubt about the fervor of the voice. It sent a chill of realization through Pasqual. He backed away.

"So you admit why you came back! To kill me like a dog."

"I came back for the treasure my father gave his life in hunting."

"But you know I must die first!"

"God forbid! I don't want to harm a hair of your head. Take me to the treasure, then go away, and save your own life."

Again the chapped, discolored lips tightened. A grunt that was something like a laugh came through his teeth. He was triumphant. He had the whole situation in the palm of his hand now.

"This much I'll tell you," he said. "I have hidden the gold."

He bore a charmed life. She would not harm him. And if she had help, the man or men she had brought would not harm him. They would need him to find the gold!

"For your own good, *hombre*, I beg you take me to where it is hidden and then save yourself!"

He had a power over her, yes, but at the same time he felt as if the whole desolate island was peopled with un-

seen dangers. The dense walls of bamboo and vines and mahogany were fraught with death. When he turned his back to the jungle he felt as though serpents were crawling out noiselessly toward him, anacondas that would coil themselves about his frail body.

A gleam of triumph in his eyes, a cold sweat of fear on his forehead—that was the state he was in.

Abruptly he ordered her to get up. "Follow me," he said. "I'll lead you to the treasure."

Of course he had no intention of doing any such thing. Once she had found the treasure, then his life was worth less than nothing. He took a trail that led over the lava beds out into the open. At least he could get away from that venomous looking growth of jaragua grass and bamboo.

The girl followed him—some twenty paces behind. He kept looking around at her. Not because he feared she would kill him, but because he began to labor under the certainty that she was in league with the unseen forces in the jungle. She would be looking about, perhaps signaling to the unknown executioners she had brought with her.

But every time he turned his ghastly face back, he saw her obediently following—her eyes dilated, hungry, like a dog following its master in hopes of a bone. He could make nothing out of her expression. It was the face of a sphinx, except for those triumphant amber colored eyes. A cat was following Pasqual, the rat.

Repeatedly the thought came to his mind that he would do best to turn and fire upon her as he had fired upon his mozo. She was in the way. After all it would be best to discard her before he went to sea. How could he enjoy his fabulous fortune with a she devil like this dogging his heels?

But each time the thought came to him, and each time his hand itched to reach for the revolver on his hip, he was gripped by that same galvanic cur-

rent of fear, that most deadly of all panics, the fear of the unseen.

A conviction preyed upon his mind that if he drew a gun he would get a slug of lead in his temple. Where it would come from he did not know: from the jungle of calabash and bamboo away off there on the edge of the plateau; from the bunch of candelabra cactus a few yards ahead of him; from behind the mound of pumice stone to his right.

He began to trudge along automatically, like a man walking in his sleep. He was not going anywhere in particular. He was just roaming. He would kill time taking the girl down into a gully, up across the ash-covered shoulder of a hill, through a banana grove, down to the beach.

And as he walked he began to realize that he was walking in precisely the same unnatural, fear-stricken way in which he had made his mozo walk ahead of him. A few hours before the luckless old Carib servant had been trudging along, dragging heavy mud-slimed relics from the sacred well, certain of death.

Pasqual was paying for the merciless hours of mental torture he had inflicted upon his servant. But he was paying tenfold, because, being of a higher mental caliber than the apelike breed, he was capable of greater mental agony.

Every moment he lost made his position that much more hopeless. For he reflected that in a little while people would be coming to El Capitan from the mainland.

He had already thought out that side of the problem. His mozo had stood off with the launch shaping a straight course westward. He could not help landing, unless the gale blew up to a storm.

The wind from the north would tend to carry the boat far down the coast, except for the strong tide that swept up from the San Luis Straits. Between wind and current the launch

would hold her course. Perhaps the mozo, wounded as he was, would get ashore and tell what had happened.

He would tell that his master had tried to murder him. He would tell that there was a great treasure back there on El Capitan, hidden in the high grass near the beach. If the mozo lived to give up this precious secret, every fishing lugger and packet in Todos Santos Lagoon would put out crowded with treasure hunters.

For this reason alone, Pasqual could not afford to lose much time. Why wander about that island, like a crazy man, which indeed he was fast becoming, leading this girl on a wild-goose chase, when he should be loading that sloop with his treasure and putting out to sea?

He was a good way from the sloop now. Why not cut down over the edge of the plateau, dive into the jungle, and make a dash for the beach? Perhaps he could shake off the girl before she actually knew what was happening.

But he did not make this desperate move. In the first place he was afraid. He was afraid of some one hiding on the sloop. He was afraid of some one shooting him as he started on his run. He was ridden with a dozen different fears that now began to flock to him from every side.

Furthermore, what good would it do him to get to that beach? It would take him some time to stow the treasure aboard. And meanwhile what would the girl be doing?

The inscrutable girl; the mozo wounded or dead, sailing toward the mainland; the jungle all around him biding its time; his brain whirled. He was thinking in circles, going over and over the same crazed trail, always back again to the starting point.

Like a squirrel in a cage, Pasqual took a trail over the desolate reaches of that plateau, coming back finally to the point from which he had started—the sacrificial well.

When the girl found herself again

near the dark grove of mahogany and bamboo and rubber trees, she called out:

"Wait! I'm following no farther."

He turned to look at her. What would she do now that she found he was tricking her?

"You've brought me back. Where is the treasure? You won't give it up! I can see that! You're going around in a circle! You're tricking me."

"Yes, by God!" He laughed a sharp hysterical laugh. "I'm tricking you. Do you think I'll take you to it? And then let you have me murdered? Oh, no! I'm too sharp for that, *señorita*! I'll keep that secret."

He laughed again. It was quite obvious that he had her where he wanted her: she did not know what to do. She could not kill him. She could not make him deliver his treasure. The utter bafflement on the girl's face, her horror at seeing him shot down, put her at a disadvantage.

Pasqual looked at her out of the narrow set caverns of his skull. Could it be possible that she had come back alone, after all?

"Just what do you plan to do now, *señorita*?" he asked almost tauntingly.

She looked at him out of dazed eyes. Everything was black except that one ratlike face, those glittering dots which were focused upon her, those tightened lips, that hideous pointing, twitching nose, like the nose of an animal smelling poisoned bait.

Finally she said in a tense voice: "You take me straight to that treasure. If you come back here again you will be killed!"

The truth was out! But she could not help it. The sight of the man sickened her, made her creep as if she were dealing with a reptile.

"So, ho!" he cried, the whites showing all about his eyes. "You confess it, eh? You've brought some *hombres* here to shoot me! *Bueno*! I thought so. I knew it. Off there in the jungle, perhaps, eh? They will shoot me as

soon as you give the signal."

"No! No!" she screamed. "There's no one. I did not mean that. I myself will fire this gun—"

"Perhaps. You will be so furious that you will shoot me when I turn my back to you, rather than to keep me alive till I give up the treasure. Perhaps."

He thrust his tongue in his cheek and his eyes twinkled. "Or are you a liar like I think you are? Have you brought back a squad of the constabulary with their rusty rifles? I think that is what you've done, *señorita*. You've hidden them in the brush. There may be three or four in the hold of your ship, eh?"

His own bantering voice was like an intoxicating drink to him. As he pretended to be brave he actually became brave. Added to this, there was the girl's soul-racking horror of hearing a gunshot from the brush, and seeing a man shot before her eyes. The womanly dread of this hideous outcome gave her the appearance of helplessness, misery. It was impossible to believe that she was not alone.

"Suppose you brought soldiers to kill me," he went on in the same hysterical, chattering defiance. "Kill me, Pasqual Hidalgo? A good joke that is to laugh! Our constabulary shooting *me*. They cannot shoot, not a man jack of them. Nor would they dare to raise a gun against me. I am the son of Hidalgo.

"And I myself can hit a mark, I'll tell you, *señorita*. This morning I killed a man at a good range—the width of that lagoon down there. No man in Todos Santos can beat me at marksmanship!" He burst into a louder, more hysterical laugh. "Bring them on, your executioners; bring them on!"

"An Americano could make short work of you," she said in a soft, calm voice.

He stopped in the midst of a guffaw, his lips wavering. "An Americano?"

he said in a whisper. He was ten paces away from her, as they stood there facing each other, but she could hear that soft murmur coming from his teeth.

There was no reason for repeating her warning. She merely challenged him with her wide amber eyes, which had contracted in the glare of the sun so that they were like points of a glowing fire.

"What Americano?" he asked.

She did not reply. Again they faced each other, like two mad dogs ready to spring at the slightest growl.

He tried to restore his nerves by another one of those brittle, hysterical laughs. "What Americanos are there on that coast? The consul, eh? An old man who can't shoot a peccary when he goes hunting in the jungles. The company agent, always drunk. The old paymaster of the railroad? *Ph-t!* Not one of them can hit a mule in a corral!"

He went into another fit of laughter, his fragile, hideous head rocking. He lunged forward toward the girl, as if he were drunk with his own mirth. Then, when within a few arms' lengths of her he was wise enough to stop. But he did not stop the flow of bantering and foul oaths that was issuing from his mouth.

"You go ashore to find an Americano, eh? Such a joke to laugh myself sick about! And not one Americano on the coast who has the guts to face one of us San Sebastians. Oh, yes—" He checked himself and stood there with legs apart, arms akimbo. "I forgot. There is one. You should have summoned him. A very crack shot, they say. Just came from the States. If you had only known!"

He was laughing now at a joke that really had some element of humor in it, a joke that the gods of El Capitan were appreciating at that very moment. "If you had got that one man I might tremble with fright. Yes, *señorita!* What a chance you missed in search-

ing for a real executioner.

"Señor Daniel Gregory, a very dangerous man. We did not fancy each other. He looked at me as if I were an iguana crawling at his feet. And I detested his looks, too, let me say to you, *señorita*. I thought, 'Some day this man and I will fight.' That's what I said. You should have fetched him."

His scrawny shoulders were convulsed. His mouth shot out a breathless laugh, like the yawn of a horse. Back there in the dense jungle a parrot laughed in mockery. Yes, the gods of El Capitan saw the joke.

When he caught his breath he said: "If you went ashore last night, *señorita*, and looked for an Americano who could really shoot, you would have found him at the Mission. You see the joke? You are smiling, too, eh? You would have found him there at the cathedral, but you could not have got him, because he was at a wedding. He was a bridegroom. A bridegroom turning into an executioner—what a lunacy!"

By this process of hysterical banter Pasqual Hidalgo had actually arrived at a conclusion. It had been a sort of process of elimination.

He had been thinking aloud, and his distracted brain had been able to follow a direct train of thought. He had been succumbing to an intangible fear, a chimera. Why was he afraid on that island—in the presence of a girl who could not and would not harm him? What else was there to be afraid of? Parrots and howling monkeys? It was ridiculous.

And it was just as ridiculous to be afraid of any one who might have got from the mainland. As he had said, he was a better shot than any of that comic opera soldiery with their dirty guns.

There was not a private, nor a general for that matter, in the San Sebastian constabulary who would have taken up the cause of this girl against Hidalgo's son. Nor was there a ci-



villian native who would have dared lift a finger against him.

Then who else was there? Two or three Americans who never mixed in with any of the local brawls, and who were too old or too sick to fight anyway.

And by this process of elimination Pasqual had arrived at one man, an American, of whom he would really have cause to be afraid: the man who was to marry

der in your beautiful eyes. I am bewitched by the venom in them. They are like the eyes of a snake—and I am a parrakeet drawn toward them. I am fascinated. I come to you to be devoured."



"I SEE MURDER IN YOUR BEAUTIFUL EYES!"

into the Hidalgo family. But, as Pasqual said, "a bridegroom turned into an executioner—what a lunacy!"

With this soul-satisfying conclusion steeling his courage, he came to a definite decision. He must waste no more of those precious moments. The launch would probably be running up on the Barrier Reef outside Todos Santos at that very moment. Soon there would be a fleet of boats putting out for El Capitan. He must get away before they came.

"Why stop to find your gold?" he laughed. "Let it stay where I hid it. If I deliver it, some one will kill me. Perhaps you will kill me! I see mur-

der in your beautiful eyes. I am bewitched by the venom in them. They are like the eyes of a snake—and I am a parrakeet drawn toward them. I am fascinated. I come to you to be devoured."

He went to her step by step, his arms outstretched. He was, indeed, like the very thing he scoffingly said he was—a bird lured by reptilian eyes. Their eyes were focused hypnotically upon each other. They saw nothing else. The green jungle, the blazing sky faded to pitch darkness. The sun was blotted out, or, rather, its rays were focused down as though through a magnifying glass into the blinding points of light: the girl's eyes that were steel, the man's that were black fire.

He leaped upon her, grabbing her wrists with his two talons, so that with a gasp of pain she let her gun fall.

If Pasqual had been in his right senses he would have noticed some-

thing very peculiar about the way the girl received his onslaught. Aside from that slight gasp, she did not utter a sound. Why did she not scream with fear as this degenerate, guaro-sodden beast leaped upon her?

She met him steadfastly standing her ground, her face a white mask of self-assurance, her gray lips set firmly in something that was almost like a smile.

She knew what was going to happen. And it happened on the instant that she had dropped her gun.

From across the mounds of lava and volcanic ash came the sharp crack of a gun. In almost the same fraction of a second the whistle of a slug followed, zipping through the crown of Pasqual's sombrero.

He stiffened, as if he had been hit. His grip was released and his hands dangled helpless, nervelessly from shaking wrists.

He did not know which way to look. He seemed afraid to look behind him or to either side. The instinct that any fighter has of watching his opponent's eyes in order to foretell the direction of the next blow, prompted him to keep his terror-stricken gaze riveted upon the girl.

Meg Cameron, of course, glanced over the man's shoulder at the dense green wall of the jungle beyond the mounds.

She saw another wink of light in the green depths — brilliant despite the glare of the sun.

Another zip, a whistling sound, and Pasqual's sombrero gave a twitch as if something alive inside had given a jump.

A third shot. The sombrero fell to the ground.

A fourth, a fifth, a sixth. Pasqual reached to his shoulder where a slug had ripped his sleeve. He swung around slowly without moving his feet. His palsied hand groped stupidly for the gun on his hip. The gun came out, dropped. The man's knees sagged, and

he fell in a twisting motion, as if unwinding himself from the first awkward turn.

He rolled to his back, his ghastly face turned toward the sun, his eyelids partially closed and showing only the muddy whites.

A cry, pregnant with the first real horror she had ever felt, escaped the girl's throat. She threw herself down beside the prostrate man.

Gregory was running across the ash mounds toward her.

"You've killed him!" she cried in anguish.

"Not unless I made a bad miss," the other said calmly.

He knelt down and picked the frail scarecrow of a man up by the scruff of his neck.

Pasqual's lips began to shiver, and saliva came from the corner of his mouth. His head lolled forward like an idiot's as Gregory ran his fingers through the thick, greasy hair.

He felt all about the small skull. Then, with his fingers digging like iron hooks into the fabric of his shirt, he ripped off the sleeve through which the lead slugs had passed.

The scrawny arm was red in two different spots, as if a hot iron had been drawn across them.

"Not a scratch, except this," Gregory said.

A gurgle came from Pasqual's drooling mouth, like the sound of a man trying to speak in the grip of a nightmare.

Gregory let go his hold, and his victim doubled up, sinking to the ground like a flimsy scarecrow loosed from its stake.

"Maestro—"

That was the first word they could distinguish.

"Yes," Gregory said. "Not your brother-in-law, but your *maestro*."

Pasqual began to jibber, his lips trying their utmost to form coherent sounds: "I will be your slave. I will take you to the treasure. I will grant

your wishes. So help me God. Only give me my miserable life!"

## CHAPTER XV

## THE CLEW



ODOS SANTOS had reverted to its life of lethargy and peace. The share farmers went back to their plantations, the banana cutters into the forests, the coffee pickers up into the sierras. The plaza was deserted except for the dogs and birds picking at the remains of the fiesta. There was your sun-baked city square with a few palm tufts, a few beggars, a swarming of green-bellied flies.

The populace, which had seethed in savage anger at the perfidious Americano, had subsided again. A night passed, and the lava was cooled.

But, as is the case with a volcano, you could not tell just how much of the lava was frozen, and how much of it still had a molten undercurrent.

There was, in fact, one particular spot in that mass of humanity which was burning with a more terrific ferocity than ever: Señor Hidalgo, the father of the bride.

All that night he raged up and down the water front, waiting for the return of his squad of constabulary.

"When they bring him back, *por Dios*, I will have him shot before my daughter's eyes!" That was the oath he kept repeating over and over again. It became a sort of motif for that night's tragic opera.

"When he finds the Americano," the word went round, "he will shoot him before his daughter's eyes!"

Hidalgo, a crazed old man like King Lear wandering in the tempest, rode up and down the beach, or paced along the sea wall, whipping his boots with an incessant fury. "Before her eyes, so help me, *Madre de Dios*!"

As the hours passed, and his constabulary failed to return, he ordered

the packet that took mail and sisal hemp to San Luis to put out to sea in search. He ordered a fishing lugger to coast the Barrier Reef from the Cacao Sierra as far south as Armadillo River.

He ordered every oyster fisherman who put out past Santa Cruz Light to watch for signs of a sloop or a motor boat of soldiers. And all the time he kept repeating the refrain: "When I find him she will see him shot. Her wrong will be avenged. Before her eyes!"

It was a strange enough sight to see the white-maned, hawk-nosed giant pacing the sea wall with a crowd of his peons and a rabble of children and dogs following him. He made no secret of his passion: he "wore his heart on his sleeve," in the Latin way. He was a madman, a pitiful picture of baffled rage, parading before the eyes of the city.

Then, late in the morning after the wedding night, something happened.

The gale was blowing again in fitful gusts, lashing up the surf beyond the Barrier Reef, thrashing the coco palms of the beach, tousling the great shock of silvery hair of the gaunt Hidalgo as he stood on the sea wall. Then, as this alcalde was raving at the waves, men came running up to him from the beach.

Others ran along the sea wall toward him, gesticulating wildly, crying out in an excited jumble of Spanish or Carib.

There it was! The motor boat, far out beyond Santa Cruz Light, bobbing up and down in the rough sea. Four men were wearily tugging at oars, trying to make some headway in the choppy water, which they were able to do only because the gale favored their course.

Hidalgo clasped his horny hands and held them up to heaven.

"*Madre de Dios*, I thank you!" he cried with trembling zeal. His hawk eyes gleamed, his chest heaved, his face, as he turned it upward to the

blazing sun, was radiant with a fanatic triumph. God had blessed him! God had delivered his enemy into his hands!

He sent a servant for his daughter, whom he had ordered to wait in readiness at home. The time had come for her to bear witness. The insult to her great historic name was to be wiped out.

She came down to the water front in a fiacre, a wisp of a girl riding through frightened crowds, her high comb bobbing this way and that as the carriage bumped along out to the pier.

"She is to see him shot before her eyes!" she heard them whispering. "Before your very eyes, *señorita*! You will witness his death, Doña Dolores!"

She shrank far back into her seat, covering her face with tiny, heavily jeweled hands. She did not want to see what was to happen. She did not want to see the faces of the crowd peering unabashed at her.

She did not want to look out there on the dazzling blue of the lagoon. She did not want to look up at her father, knowing full well that it would be a terrible thing to see murder contorting that lean, dark countenance.

The crowd thought she was ashamed, covering her face like that—ashamed at what had happened the night before at the San Felipe Mission.

But Todos Santos did not understand Doña Dolores!

She met her father at the end of the pier, and her eyes fastened steadfastly on her own high-heeled Paris slippers.

"*Sanctissima Madre*, where are we going?" she wailed, as her father's major-domo helped her to alight.

"Out there to kill the *hombre* who insulted you!"

"It is murder!" she said, clasping her jeweled hands.

"It is just."

"Will my father kill a man without cause?"

"Without cause! *Por Dios*! Is that not cause enough, to forsake a

bride at the altar?"

"There is no law that says the man shall be killed. My father will be a murderer."

"He will take care of that. He is the *alcalde*. He will find a cause and set it down in the municipal records."

"There is no cause yet," the little *señorita* cried.

"He will take the *Americano* prisoner, and then let him escape. When he escapes he will have him shot. Thus he will explain it to the American consul, who is sick in bed this morning and will accept any explanation."

Hidalgo, in his feverish zeal to be the first to see the perfidious *Americano*, stood at the very end of the pier on the cap log, the wind blowing back the hair from his radiant face. The launch, propelled laboriously by oars, had stood in past the grim barnacled ramparts of Santa Cruz Light, and now, having crossed the smoother water of the lagoon, was sheering up to the wharf head.

Hidalgo glared down at the open boat, and his face darkened. He could not have been more astonished than if he had seen a squad of his constabulary lying there dead in the bottom boards.

Indeed, the ragged soldiers seemed half dead as it was. One of them was in the stern sheets, lying down, his shoulder bandaged with a torn shirt. The four who had been pulling wearily at the oars, rested their bent backs and peered up from under the rims of their *sombreros* into the grim, murderous face of their *maestro*.

"Where is your prisoner?" the latter screamed out vehemently.

"Only God knows!" the corporal pleaded in a piteous voice. "He shot this soldier at long range, to kill him. But the victim still lives in torture."

"Then the dog *Americano* showed fight?" the old father cried eagerly. "And you killed him, eight of you fighting against one?"

"*Por Dios*, no!" the corporal cried, throwing up the painter to a dock



hand. "He shot at long range, longer than any man will believe if we ever tell of this circumstance. He shot down this man who was the helmsman, and then before another hand was at the wheel we ran afoul of his sloop, and he took us prisoner."

"Took eight soldiers prisoner!" Hidalgo roared in fury.

"Even so, *maestro!*"

The father held his shaking fists to heaven. He swore that every man of that squad would be cast into prison. He swore against their dirty guns, against their clumsy seamanship, against their cowardly souls.

"*Maestro! Maestro!*" they pleaded. "We could do nothing. He captured our firearms, and then made us tow him far to the horizon over there." He pointed northeast, across the shoulder of El Capitan.

"I send you out to take him prisoner, and he makes you tow his boat out to sea!" Hidalgo fairly screamed. "Constabulary—eh? *Pth-t!* A bunch of mangy rats!"

He ordered them ashore, and then, as they stood dripping and bedraggled in front of him, his anger displayed more the element of contempt than of anything else. For he was still obsessed with the one great desire to see the Americano shot down before his daughter's eyes.

Where had the Americano gone? Where had they towed his sloop? When the gale started to blow, which way did the sloop sail?

These questions could not be answered with any degree of certainty. As the corporal had explained, he was ordered to tow the helpless sailboat to the northeast. They might have been heading for British Honduras, and were thus getting as far out in the Caribbean as possible, with the hope of picking up a breeze.

One of Hidalgo's henchmen ventured the guess that they might have been getting enough northing in order to run down before the gale, should

one start to blow, and thus make for El Capitan before the wind.

This was actually what had happened. But Meg Cameron, in order not to divulge her course, had kept on out to sea on a port tack, giving the impression that she was going to beat up against the wind.

"Once in British Honduras, the fugitive is forever escaped," the corporal said. "He will never come back to Todos Santos."

On the other hand, as has been suggested, they might have run down before the wind and landed on El Capitan.

"Once in El Capitan, the fugitive is mine!" Hidalgo cried, preferring in his zeal to take the more optimistic alternative.

But now what was to be done? Should they sail northeast with the hope of overtaking the sloop before she got into the haven of Belize in British Honduras? Or should they sail over to El Capitan?

The crowd on the pier and the spray-soaked soldiers crowding around their *maestro* waited for orders.

Hidalgo himself did not know what to do. He was again frustrated, maddened at the possibility that the Americano was going to get out of his grasp.

Northeast, or due east. Which wild-goose chase should they embark on? Providence decreed that the frenzied old Hidalgo need not make the choice.

From the sea, just off the gleaming combers of the Barrier Reef, a gaudy launch with tattered, faded awning and flags was chugging along, shaping her course directly for Santa Cruz Light. Then into the lagoon, then straight for the pier.

It was Pasqual Hidalgo's launch.

The weed-slimed, barnacle-covered little tub came plowing merrily along until she reached the pier head.

Hidalgo and the crowd, eager for news from any craft that had been out in the Straits, stared as she sloughed up alongside.

A grizzled little fisher called out in Spanish:

"Where is the alcalde?"

Then he saw the central and tallest figure of the crowd. Hidalgo himself was looking down upon him.

"I bring evil tidings, señor alcalde!" The Carib fisherman removed his grass sombrero. "I fear for your son's life."

The white-maned hawk gasped as his talons dug into the leath of his riding crop. A prayer issued from his lips. His son! The man built in his image! The man that he worshiped, the man that was a part of his own being! Pasqual, the beloved!

"You fear; you do not know? He is dead? No, no! God is not so unjust! God will protect him! Quick, you scurvy-ridden breed, quick—tell me—"

"This boat, his boat—"

"Yes, I know. *Madre de Dios*, go on!"

"Señor, I found this boat on the rocks, and a man at the wheel."

"My son—"

"No, señor alcalde, his mozo."

"And he said—what?"

"He spoke no word, señor, for he was dead."

"Dead?" The tall, imposing figure had shrunk. Hidalgo was no longer an alcalde. He was a broken old man, beating his flat chest, choking out inchoate words.

"Dead, with his hand at the wheel, señor. His arm was stiff, and thrust through the spokes, clutching the binnacle. Dead, stiff, a carcass, señor, with a bullet hole in his back." Then he added fearfully: "The carcass is on board, señor!"

"But my son?"

"He was not on board, señor!"

Hidalgo looked back at his men, a dazed, tortured expression coming over his face. For the first time since the scene in the cathedral he had completely forgotten his daughter.

What was a daughter? What was

she compared to a son, an heir, the replica of the father? What was her wrong compared to this unthinkable tragedy?

His son's boat wrecked upon the reef, a dead helmsman at the wheel. Hidalgo shuddered to think what that might mean.

He leaped down to the deck of the launch and then to the cockpit. Yes, there was a body—a huge, shapeless mass, covered with a tarpaulin.

The alcalde called to one of his henchmen, who immediately jumped down beside him and threw the cover back, revealing the corpse of Hidalgo's son's servant, with face turned upward, lids half closed, showing the muddy whites, lips half parted, but forever dumb.

In a frenzy to learn the truth, to get some tiny clew to this dreadful secret, the alcalde directed his follower to tear at the old clothes, searching the pockets, searching for other marks besides that one enigmatic sign—the bullet hole in the back.

The body was scratched with cut grass and cactus and jagged rocks, the clothes torn, dusty, covered with burrs. But this gave no clew to where he had been. Cactus, cut grass, rocks—you will find them anywhere.

Hidalgo got up, his face wet, his eyes blood drained. He stood there a moment, while the crowd on the pier remained hushed and afraid.

"*Madre de Dios!* The truth!"

He was looking at the breed's huge boots. They were ragged, and remnants of patched leather sewed with rawhide strips, bereft of tongue or heel. Big holes were in the soles, displaying the leathery hide of his foot, blackened with volcanic ash. A toe with a thick, tortoise-shell nail stuck out in front. It, too, was blackened with ash. Ash sifted in above his arches where the tongues should have been.

"The volcano!" Hidalgo cried exultantly. "This man has waded in

ashes! The Americano killed him! The Americano is at El Capitan and he has killed this man. And if God is unjust, he has killed my son!"

He screamed up to the crowded pier. He ordered his daughter to climb down the ladder. She must sail to El Capitan with him and witness the death of her faithless bridegroom.

"He shoots one of my soldiers. He shoots my son's servant!" Hidalgo cried in triumph. "*Bueno!* It is enough! I will have his foul carcass riddled with bullets! Now I have a cause that the law will uphold. *I condemn him to death!*"

They heard his voice piercing the deathlike stillness. "Quick. A firing squad come aboard! Doña Dolores and eight soldiers. This instant we sail to the volcano!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### KILLING TIME



T El Capitan an American woman and her companion were following a miserable and terrified thing into the jungle.

Pasqual Hidalgo scarcely retained the semblance of a human being. His clothes were torn, his hands and face bleeding, one of his red-rimmed eyes black and swollen. Evidently he had experienced some rough treatment at the hands of the Americano.

The reason for it was this: he had tried once again to play a trick and lead his captors on a false clew. Up into a narrow cañon he had taken them, climbing and scrambling over huge boulders, across stretches of cinders, higher up over the rocks of dry waterfalls. Near the top of the gorge the bed made a sharp turn, and there was a rise of fifteen feet, from which, in the rainy seasons, a torrent of water poured.

Pasqual climbed up first, leading the way at all times with Gregory's gun

leveled at him.

Swinging up by means of a double-stemmed creeper, he got to the top while Gregory was following hand over hand. Before his two captors got up to the level which Pasqual had reached, the latter had just time enough to dislodge a small boulder and roll it to the edge of the shelf.

If he had taken a moment's more time to get a precise aim he could have dropped it plumb upon Gregory's head. But he did not have this extra moment. Gregory was watching him like a cat, for fear his prisoner would make a break for liberty if he so much as got out of sight for a second.

The boulder fell, catching Gregory a glancing blow on the shoulder.

The length of the drop was too short for a serious blow. The rock went hurtling down the gorge bed, while Dan clung for dear life to the creeper. In another moment he had swung himself up.

He had let fly a blow into the cringing Pasqual's face. The man dropped senseless, then rolled over the brink, crashing through the branches of trees and clumps of cactus, rolling to the jagged rocks of the gorge bed.

He lay there unconscious for a space of time, then slowly came to, opening his eyes and gazing upward.

He saw the two heads, Gregory's and the girl's, whirling about him in a sort of merry-go-round of grim, pallid masks. Above them the crater of El Capitan was tipping this way and that, as though a cataclysmic eruption of the volcano were rocking the whole firmament. Over its shoulder the late afternoon sun was wheeling like a bleeding vulture.

His blurred gaze began to focus upon one of those bobbing heads—the square grim face of the man.

The vision grew abnormally clear, until every infinitesimal wrinkle in the forehead, the stern hard lips, the green dots in the blue of the eyes, the red veins in the eyeballs, the bristle of

beard on the chin—all these details seared themselves into Pasqual's brain.

It was no use bluffing them any longer. How could he keep on dragging his aching body over those lava trails, up rocky stream beds, and through the cutting grass and cactus? How could he stand to have this merciless slave driver browbeating him, pommeling him, breaking his bones? Death would be easier to bear than torture. Death was far more welcome than the fear of death.

"I'll take you, *maestro!*" he moaned. "I will go straight to the place where the treasure is hidden. So help me God, I will delay no more. I am beaten. I am tired. I am crazed. Only go a few steps away so I may breathe."

He struggled up with a groan, resting a moment, propping himself up by his arms, then grabbing a tree root on the bank and slowly getting to his feet.

He stood there swaying, holding the root with one hand, his forehead with the other. He looked down the gorge in the direction from which they had at first come. His gaze went beyond the bamboo-covered hillocks below, then across the white combers to the sea.

Only a portion of the horizon could be seen from where they stood, but Pasqual studied that small arc with an eager intensity.

He was looking for something of which his two captors must have been totally ignorant: a sail, or the sign of a boat.

He knew that the mozo whom he had shot down would have reached the mainland shore long before this. He estimated very closely just about where the launch would land, unquestionably on the Barrier Reef. Fishermen in the lagoon, or out in the sea, would most certainly find the launch pounding herself to pieces on the coral banks. Then they would search out Pasqual's father.

There could be no possible hitch to

this train of events. The only complication would have been a storm. But the gale continued in a steady two-reef blow, neither freshening nor dropping. The launch must have been horsed on the reef several hours ago.

That would mean an expedition from Todos Santos which ought to be crossing the Straits right now.

Pasqual did not keep his gaze riveted on that water very long. He must not let them think that he expected help. He must let them rest blissful in their assurance that they would be alone on that island—alone after they had found their treasure, and after they had killed Pasqual Hidalgo.

"It is in the fort, *señor,*" he said, pointing a gnarled finger to the northernmost point of the island. "Over there in the ancient fort, where they kept their murderers prisoners a hundred years ago. Deep in a dungeon, I swear *por Dios*, it is there. Now, I beg you, *señor*, let me go free, for I have told you the truth."

"Perhaps you've told the truth," Gregory shot back. "But you don't get away until I find out. Now walk ahead and pick out the shortest trail to the fort, unless you want to be dragged across the rocks."

"No, no, *señor!*" he whimpered. "Do not drag me. My body is in torture!"

Gregory had taken him by the shoulder and hurled him forward on the trail. "Every bone, *señor,*" Pasqual wailed, "feels as if crushed by rocks. My flesh writhes with the cactus needles. I swear to you, *señor*, by the Holy Saints, that I am this time telling you the truth. In the dungeon it is. I swear to you, *por Dios!*"

Thus it was that they came out of the gorge, and traveled across the lowlands, then across the stretch of marshes, and out to the cliffs of the sea. Pasqual had taken them far inland, and the journey back to the inlet where the fort was, was long and hot.

The prisoner was sick with loss of



blood and with the pain in his racked bones. It looked as though he were paying dearly for having tricked his two captors.

That, at any rate, was what his captors thought.

As for Pasqual, he knew better. He kept his eyes always on the horizon.

If he could cling to life for but another hour, he knew that help would come.

## CHAPTER XVII

### DISASTER



At the northern tip of El Capitan Island, where the cliffs of the plateau drop abruptly to a shelf of land some hundred feet above sea level, you will see the remains of the fort.

Its grim ramparts arise from the pounding surf at high tide. The narrow windows barred with rusty iron face north and west. The whole fort is mottled with broken mortar, crumbling coral stone, thickly incrustated with barnacles below, mantled with moss and creepers above.

On the landward side of the fort the wall is a mass of foliage, as though it were protected on that side merely by moundlike ramparts of earth.

Pasqual Hidalgo evidently knew where to find the entrance in this mass of bamboo and calabash trees and vines. He led the way through the narrow bowerlike opening, and his two captors found themselves standing in an open court.

They walked across the flagstones, which were carpeted with moss and broken up in a pattern of grass that had grown up in the interstices.

Passing three rusty muzzle loaders, in the mouths of which the birds had built their nests, the guide showed the way to a grimly ironed door.

Evidently this led to the caliboza, or dungeon, for the door could be locked from the outside. The lock,

however, was little more than an iron bar, heavily coated with rust and lichen.

Pasqual grasped the bar with his shaking, lacerated hands, but either because he wanted to kill a few more moments of precious time, or else because he was actually too weak, he could not budge it.

Gregory shoved him out of the way and knocked the bar upward.

The door opened with a creaking groan, and from the cell there came a draft of dank, foul air.

Gregory turned to the ragged, sniveling Pasqual who had sunk to the flagstones and lay gasping, the sickest and the most miserable caricature of a man they had ever seen.

"You will kill me now, *señor!*" he was moaning. "I should not have told you. I am no use to you any more. But don't kill me. I beg you, spare my wretched life!"

Neither Dan nor his companion were listening. The anticipation of finding their treasure at last had completely gripped them. There was room for no other thought, no other fear.

But Dan was still skeptical. He was not going to take any chance of letting his prisoner dart off through the brush-filled gateway.

"I'll go in myself," he said to Meg. "You watch this *hombre*. Don't let him get up."

Gregory passed through the narrow door, and was swallowed up in the dark shadows of the fort's interior.

The girl kept Pasqual covered. For a moment a qualm of doubt went through her now that she was alone with this cornered rat. She saw that a change had come over him. He was not whimpering.

He was not gasping for breath as he had done, or pretended to do, just before Gregory passed through that door. There was a look of deadly humor in the tightening of the lips. It looked like a certainty that he was playing another trick.

Meg Cameron had a fear that he might be trapping her companion. Was it a trapdoor? What was there inside that caliboz? Perhaps there was a dungeon, into which Dan Gregory would fall to his death in the dark.

In the silence she heard Dan in there striking a match, and fumbling around. She did not dare to look. She did not dare to take her gaze away from the two little rat's eyes that were looking up at her, twinkling merrily.

What was in Pasqual's mind? It was a sudden flash of hope, a definite promise, held out to him by a gracious fate that his miserable life would be spared. And he had seen the sign of his deliverance, like the rainbow given as a sign to Noah, on the horizon.

A little splotch of color, red and yellow, a flash of snow-white spray, a black speck—his launch!

He had seen it a short while before, because at all times he had been eagerly scanning the water of the Straits in the hope that some one would be coming from the mainland. And there they came!

As he focused his fiery dots of eyes on the girl he was estimating just how far he would have to leap to clutch at her hand that held the gun.

It was too far, if she were watching. A single second was all she needed to pull the trigger.

But if she could be delayed for that one second! If he could make her look over her shoulder, up to that parapet where the vultures were seated waiting; or toward one of those grim cannon; or off to the smoking crater—that was all the time he would need.

He did not think very long upon this problem. In the first place he did not have time. Gregory would be out in another moment with the news that there was no treasure in that foul dark cell. In the second place Pasqual did not have to think long to find some excuse to make the girl look away.

Almost the instant that Gregory had gone into the cell Pasqual arose.

The girl warned him not to take a step or she would fire.

The threat was not necessary. He did not move from the spot. But instead he pointed a trembling finger over the parapet to the west. Then, in an eager tenor voice, vibrating so that it was like a song, he cried softly: "A boat, a boat! See there, *por Dios!* A boat from the mainland!"

The girl went white. Immediately she had a vision of all Todos Santos reaching out in fury for the blood of the bridegroom who had forsaken their beloved Doña.

She turned to look.

A leap, the leap of a cornered rat for the throat of its enemy, followed.

A talonlike arm gripped her wrist as if teeth were digging into her flesh. The gun dropped, she was hurled bodily against the door of the cell.

It banged shut with the force of her own weight.

And almost simultaneous with that crash, she heard Pasqual slam the iron latch into place.

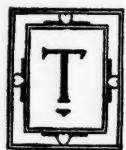
The next instant she saw the jaundiced haggard face thrust up like a skull for her to look at.

A little second. That was all it took.

And Dan Gregory was a prisoner.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CUNNING OF THE RAT



THE moment that Gregory had entered that prison door he struck a match.

The glare was so bright from the single little flame that it filled the vaultlike interior in every corner. A wooden box, half eaten away by worms and ants, an old hammock of pita fiber that lay on the floor like a bunch of rotten straw, a niche with a crumbled figure of a saint and a rat's nest, that was all he could see until the wind from a crack on the seaward wall of the cell blew out his match.

It left his eyes momentarily blinded. He felt for another match, in order to make sure of the truth, that Pasqual had led them once more on a wild-goose chase.

But something happened before he had a chance to light it. He heard the vibrant voice of the girl outside, warning her prisoner not to move. Then the voice of Pasqual, soft, unintelligible. Then a scuffle.

He whirled on the instant toward the door. But where was the door? The dim finger of the late afternoon sunlight which had been pointing across the threshold went out like the flame of his match, leaving him blinded and confused by the pitch blackness, startled at the crash in the silence as the massive mahogany door was slammed shut. There was the harsh clank of the drawbar being knocked into place; and then a jet black darkness.

Gregory staggered forward, falling against the door as if some one had given him a blow on the chin.

Then a surge of panic and fury took hold of him. The picture of Pasqual Hidalgo's face as he had last seen it, fragile, ghastly, malevolent, appeared in the darkness, as vivid as if it were actually before him, illumined by many lights.

For the first time since he had arrived on that island, Gregory was gripped with fear. It was in fact the first time in his life that he knew just what abject terror could mean. It was not a terror focused upon himself, but upon something he loved. He heard the girl's piteous scream, a remote and desperate cry beyond the locked door.

In a blind panic he hurled himself against the massive mahogany. He was a madman pounding out his life against the walls of a madman's cell.

The key to the conflict between Meg Cameron and the rat Pasqual was that six-gun which had been knocked from her hand. Both of them realized this.

The locked door, the imprisoned "madman," the coming of the launch, these details sank into insignificance on the instant.

There was the gun lying between two flagstones, its muzzle protruding from a clump of grass. Both went for it together.

The girl was the nearer. She stooped to pick it up on the run. But, as her hand went into the grass, Pasqual timed a kick that sent the six-gun sliding across the court.

The next moment he had jumped in between the girl and the precious weapon. He stood there crouching, his fingers spread out like claws ready to tear her to pieces if she advanced another step.

It did not take much intuition on Meg Cameron's part to realize what the flame in those little red eyes meant. He was going to kill her. She saw it in every distorted wrinkle of his face, as he leaned to her, tilting his small, ungainly skull upward so that the sunlight suffused his jaundiced skin with a dark, ugly glow.

She turned and fled. She fled just in time to dart into the shadowy recesses of vines and grass and bamboo before Pasqual had picked up the gun and turned it upon her.

Shots whistled through the deep gloom on both sides of her, zipping into the trunk of a palm, splintering a bamboo, cutting into the rim of the pith helmet which the girl wore.

Pasqual paused when he got to the gate of the fort through which she had run. His murderous frenzy was complicated by other more vital problems. What if that prisoner, hurling himself against that worm-eaten mahogany, escaped?

What was going to happen when that boat standing in through the mouth of the inlet, landed on the beach? Who was aboard? What did they know? Why had they come? Had the mozo lived to tell them the secret of the treasure, hidden down

there in the high jaragua grass near the girl's sloop?

These questions were far more important to the fortunes of Pasqual Hidalgo than the life of that terrified woman. He had shown her definitely that she would better stay away from the fort if she valued her life. Her part now was of little importance.

He ran back to the seaward wall of the fort and peered through the crenelated ramparts along the sights of one of the rusty old cannon.

There she was, his own little launch!

Yes, the truth must be out. His mozo had reached the shore, and death must have stayed its hand until he delivered up the precious secret.

What was to be done now? If Pasqual left the fort the girl would come back and liberate her companion. He scowled fiercely at the oncoming launch. His breath was held, then it was exhaled in a shudder. Why hadn't he finished that scurvy mozo when he had the chance to make a safe, conclusive shot?

The launch rolled in over the bar directly under the fort. She was so close that Pasqual could almost drop a stone upon her ragged awning, an awning from under the edge of which protruded the sombreros of a row of soldiers.

Then it was that he recognized his father. Hidalgo was standing at the prow, his hat in his hand, his silvery mane tossing in the breeze.

Just what this meant, Pasqual could not for the life of him imagine. Nor did he have time to conjecture.

All eyes in the boat were turned upward now toward the fort. They had heard those shots.

The gaunt, savage figure at the prow was looking up. The hawk eyes recognized the small, slim figure up there on the ramparts. He shouted an order to his helmsman, his voice ringing exultantly.

The launch swung about. She did not proceed up the inlet to where the

sloop and the treasure were. Instead she heaved to, ran in under the lee of the cliffs, and the helmsman nosed her gently to the edge of the beach.

In another instant Hidalgo was ashore, and with him a half dozen of his ragtag soldiers with their old rifles.

Pasqual watched eagerly and started to chuckle to himself: *They did not know where the treasure was after all!*

Indeed, Pasqual realized that they were after something else. And it was not hard for him to guess what it was. The mozo had kept the secret—or else he had died before his craft came ashore on the Barrier Reef. And here came the old Hidalgo to find out just why his son's servant had been shot.

Well, Pasqual would tell him. But he would not tell the truth. He would say that the Americano had killed the old servant and tortured the master.

A very neat little outcome to the whole problem. Particularly neat, inasmuch as the Americano was a prisoner, smashing his head like a blowfly against the mahogany door!

## CHAPTER XIX

### HIDALGO'S DRAMA



HIDALGO left Doña Dolores on board the launch in company with a negro soldier and the corporal. He wanted to find out just what was going on up there in the fort, just what those gunshots meant, before taking his daughter ashore.

He climbed the steep ascent from beach to fort, through the dense jungle of calabash and fern and bamboo.

On arriving there he found his son.

With a cry of joy mingled with dismay he took the slim, ungainly form in his arms. He saw his son's hands lacerated by thorn and rock, his clothes torn, his teeth clotted with blood, an eye blackened! What a broken, piteous semblance of a man! Hidalgo's own image, his own flesh and blood!



"Before God, my son, what has happened!" He held the broken, sniveling man at arm's length and looked upon him with the compassion which is likened only to that of a father pitying his children, of a God pitying those who fear Him!

"We found your launch on the reef, your mozo dead," Hidalgo was saying.

"TheAmericano, the dog who was to marry into our family!" Pasqual whimpered. "He has tortured me."

"A fiend, a murderer!" Hidalgo cried in rage. "He has tortured my son, and killed the servant of my son!"

"Yes, you have learned the truth. He shot him, a cowardly shot in the back," Pasqual lied calmly. "Then he captured me and swore he would kill me by inches. And all because of a quarrel we had on the pier at Todos Santos two weeks ago!"

It was then that the prisoner, Dan Gregory, having spent his frenzy in repeated attacks upon the old door, and having rested a moment to regain his breath, started in again in a desperate attempt to crash the worm-eaten boards.

Pasqual pointed a finger that was shaking violently.

"It is he—in there!"

"A prisoner!" the father exclaimed incredulously.

"I escaped him and ran to this fort." The lies were coming glibly to his lips. "He searched for me—he and his woman. And when he went into that cell I closed the door on him. The woman sees your sail, and in that moment, when she does not watch me, I spring at her and get her gun."

"The woman, the villainess who stole my daughter's bridegroom at the altar!" Hidalgo cried in pallid fury. "Where is she now?"

"I fired. She is too quick. She hides in the gloom of the jungle. If I had not seen you coming at that moment I would have tracked her down."

"You should have tracked her down, *por Dios!*" the fanatical old

hawk cried. "She would be here to witness this scene, she who took Dolores's man away from her!"

Pasqual jumped eagerly at this point. He wanted to get away. He knew well enough that his father would attend to theAmericano. They would all be avenged—the wronged father, the shamed bride, the tortured son. Pasqual was satisfied.

But his hunger for vengeance did not compare with that of the fanatical Hidalgo. There was another passion that obsessed Pasqual: avarice was greater than hate. In a word he was thinking now of that treasure, hidden down there at the waterside in the tall grass.

How could he get away? It should not be very hard. His father was engrossed with his own drama of the execution of theAmericano. Darkness was coming. It would come quickly as soon as that dilated sun sank beyond the Cordillera of the mainland.

A crash against the door louder than any of the others, and the big mahogany boards bulged outward, one of them splintering. Gregory evidently had dislodged one of the stones of the wall and was using it as a battering-ram.

Pasqual was white.

"I will go after the woman," he said quickly. "I know the trail she took over the hillside."

"You will need soldiers," the father said anxiously.

"No, no. She is unarmed. And one man is enough to trail her. These ragtags would only be in the way, and betray the pursuit. Whereas I can creep through the jungle unseen on her trail."

"*Bueno*, I will trust you to get her," the father said quickly, giving his son a last embrace.

Another powerful smash from within the door of the prison. Something was bound to happen. The door was old, the hinges rusty from the dank, tropic air, the wood eaten by worms

and ants. It was not the impregnable dungeon it had been a century before.

"Go over there, you men, three to each side. No, don't unlatch it. Wait till he breaks through. Then leap on him with your bayonets."

Pasqual heard this order. It satisfied him completely. He was free now to go down to the beach. Where the girl was, he did not care. She was probably hiding in the dense thicket of bamboos and creepers just beyond the wall of the fort. But what difference did it make? The only one thought that was in his excited and fevered mind was the thought of that treasure.

As his father's soldiers took their places on either side of the door, Pasqual Hidalgo slipped off into the jungle.

Meg Cameron was hiding just beyond the wall. She had seen and heard everything. There was Gregory, fighting like mad to get out—to get out into the midst of his enemies!

There they were waiting for him, eager to taste his blood. There was the father of the bride, from whom Meg Cameron herself had stolen the bridegroom!

What could Meg Cameron do? Terrified at the imminence of this tragedy, helpless, unarmed, she groped wildly in the maelstrom of her mind for an answer. At least it looked as if the fanatic old Hidalgo was going to make something of a ceremony of this execution. He had sent for his daughter. He would wait for her. He was obsessed with that one desire to have her faithless bridegroom shot down before her eyes.

But what good would this delay do? What could happen meanwhile? There they were, the only human beings on this volcano island.

In a cast of characters like that, what part could Meg Cameron play? A small part, the smallest part of all, a supernumerary that no one would watch, not even the vultures up there sitting on the turret of the tower like

gods watching this pitiful human drama.

But what she had to offer, she would offer. She could offer herself, which, like the "widow's mite," would perhaps find favor in the sight of Heaven.

She walked out boldly onto the stage, the court of the fort.

Dan Gregory was hurling a rock against the door, making repeated assaults upon the rotten wood. She prayed that the door would hold for one little moment more, until she had made her plea.

"Who in the name of the devils of hell are you?" Hidalgo cried.

"I am the woman you want," she said calmly.

"Want for what? *Madre de Dios!* Are you mad to come out of hiding into this scene?"

"I've come to give myself up so that you will get the guilty one, and let the innocent one go."

"Guilty! Innocent one! What lunacy is this!" Hidalgo fairly laughed. "I want nothing of you. I am the alcalde, and I know better than to fight with a woman, and have a whole nation's wrath poured on my head! Get out of my sight!"

"It was I that enticed Dan Gregory from the wedding," the girl went on resolutely. "He could not refuse me, his countrywoman in distress. Would any man refuse that?"

She was emboldened by the sound of her own voice as she poured out her supplications, more quickly, more fervently.

"Take me. It was I who brought this insult to your precious daughter. Dan Gregory would have gone back. He would have explained. He is innocent of all the crimes you've laid against him. He did not shoot anybody. It's a lie, made up by that filthy rat who sneaked off in the jungle.

"We came here and found no one except your son, and Gregory took him prisoner because he made an attack on me. There's the whole truth.

I've bared everything. Do anything you want with me. But let the innocent man go."

"Innocent! *Por Dios!* You are as mad as a hornet. Out of my sight, you! You who enticed my daughter's man from the very altar! Out, before I tear you to pieces!"

"You mean you'll go on with this foul murder?" she cried, her equipoise vanishing. She was frantic, frenzied—a woman fighting for her mate, a tigress fighting for her young.

"Get her out of the way!" Hidalgo called to his soldiers. "Keep her away until the execution is over and then let her go free. I want nothing to do with her."

She was screaming as two of the soldiers came from the dungeon door and laid hands upon her. Gregory heard the scream beyond the thick walls. It was the only sound he had heard since the coming of Hidalgo and his men.

Another ponderous crash against the door.

"Take her off!"

Hidalgo shouted.

"Up there to that tower until this work is accomplished. Before she goes free let her look on this death, as my daughter will look upon it. The two women shall see. The one who enticed the man away, and the one who was wronged."

Thus they bore Meg Cameron away, fighting and screaming until she sank in utter exhaustion. A pitiful and inert little body, they dragged her across the moss-covered flagstones to the narrow door at the base of the turret.

Then they carried her up the wind-

ing adobe steps to a room with a barred window, just underneath the crenelated turret, where the vultures were still sitting, hungry and attentive. The girl, the vultures, Doña Dolores, the



THEY BORE MEG  
AWAY, FIGHTING,  
SCREAMING

red domain of Heaven: the drama would be enacted before that audience.

## CHAPTER XX

### INTRIGUE



AN GREGORY had made repeated onslaughts on the ancient door, hurling his full weight against the iron-bound mahogany. The rusty old hinges creaked, mortar fell in chunks.

After many attempts to burst the

door by hurling his shoulder against it, he had succeeded in dislodging one of the squares of volcanic stone in the arch. Lifting this above his head, he hurled it with all his strength.

The rotten mahogany cracked down the very center from arch to threshold.

Another attempt and then another.

It took an eternity. He felt as if he had spent the last vestige of his strength seven times, and that each time some demoniac power had been born again within him.

As a matter of fact that eternity was only twenty minutes. But in that twenty minutes a lot had happened: the girl had fled from the murderous Pasqual; Hidalgo had come up from the beach with his soldiers; Pasqual had slipped off into the jungle, pretending to hunt for the girl; and the girl herself had returned to the scene and been imprisoned in the turret.

A final terrific onslaught with the rock, and the rusty hinges snapped.

The two halves of the door fell outward with a bang, and Gregory found himself facing the crimson glare of a dilated sun, that was setting beyond a horizon of giant cohune palms.

Blinking at the sudden light, Gregory took a leap and landed on the other side of the mass of splintered mahogany and rusty iron.

And then it happened.

He felt the sharp points of bayonets like the innumerable spikes of a cactus thrust into his body from both sides.

At the same instant a tall, gaunt man stepped out in front of him.

It all happened in one second—the leap across the fallen door, the thrust of bayonets, the vision of Señor Hidalgo appearing before him as if conjured up out of the moss-covered flagstones of the court.

What a picture that gaunt figure made against the giant sun, a picture of hunger about to be satisfied, of fury to be appeased, of an obsessed man triumphing over his obsession.

He spoke with an effort as if trying

to bridle his tongue. He made a gesture with his arm as if restraining it against an insatiable desire to rend his victim to pieces. The effort made his taut muscles tremble. His voice shook.

"Do not kill him," he said. "Bind his hands. But do not kill him. Dolores must see."

One of the soldiers gripped Gregory's arms. He was about to squirm and fight, but the slightest movement brought the bayonets pinioning him from every side. One of them pierced his clothes and made a sharp pain in his thigh. He felt the warm trickle of blood.

Another soldier bound his hands behind him with a rawhide reata. Still another took the revolver from his holster.

He was whirled around so that the alcalde could see that his bonds were well tied. As he faced the open door he saw the unshaven chins of the soldiers, the ferret eyes with muddy whites, the scraggly horse mane hair.

There had been no commotion. The constabulary had done their work well for once. They had made no sound. It was merely a silent step forward from the wall on the two sides of the door, a thrusting out of their rifle bayonets. Not a word from them, not a sound from their throats as they held their breath.

Hidalgo was satisfied. He stood before his prisoner triumphant, cracking his fingers, breathing heavily, as if in a series of soundless laughs.

Dan Gregory heard that sound above the cry of parrots and the screech of the norther. It sent a chill through him. It horrified him more than the words which Hidalgo was speaking.

"Do not shoot him. We will wait for her, his bride. Let his bride see this. She must see with her own eyes when he is shot down."

A scream from the tower. The condemned man looked up.

There was a white oval face thrust



through the iron bars of the narrow casement.

His "bride" would witness his death. And this woman he loved was to bear witness likewise!

Down at the water's edge where the launch was moored, Dolores, the corporal, and the negro private, had received the summons from Hidalgo.

The Jamaican, his huge, ebony back glistening with sweat, helped Doña Dolores ashore. His muddy eyes were glued upon the vision of beauty in white silk mantilla and jeweled comb as he lifted her from the launch, irresolute, frightened, like a gorgeous bird that had alighted upon a strange and dangerous shore.

What a vivid splash of color she was down there in the light of the setting sun. She seemed to emit gleams of fire from various parts of her form. Jewels sent out rays from her slim olive colored fingers. A bracelet set with Spanish topaz glowed like tiny red coals about her wrist. Her tiny golden slippers twinkled in the weeds and water that swashed on the beach.

The giant negro stood before her, his huge paws held out like a beggar asking for alms. Without a word she unsnapped the glittering bracelet from her wrist and gave it to him.

He nodded his head, his great lips parted, his tongue wetting the corner of his mouth.

You might wonder what this great black beast could do with that fragile, precious little thing he held in his hand. He looked down at it, his eyes bulging, as if he had found a gorgeous and venomous viper coiled in his yellow palms.

His eyes went up again, and met the calm, dark eyes of the vision in front of him.

He nodded, his head lolling forward rhythmically as if his bulging neck had lost all tension.

The corporal had leaped ashore. He had seen nothing of this pantomime.

Indeed, if he had seen it he would scarcely have cudged his brain about its possible significance. He was too much concerned with the coming execution of an Americano, in which he himself must take an important part—the rôle of the corporal of a firing squad.

Doña Dolores, giving her bracelet to the private who was to guard the launch, that might mean something, and it might mean nothing. She was a peculiar little woman, this Doña Dolores. She was whimsical and illogical, petulant and unhappy.

She would give gifts to her father's mozos. She would have others put in the calibozas for drunkenness. She would save others from punishment, not by intercession with her stern father, but by bribes and intrigues, a form of sport that was dear to her Latin heart.

The corporal hurried her ashore and across the beach to a path that led through swamp hyacinths. He was impatient, nervous, distraught, like an amateur actor who wants to get to the stage door an hour ahead of time, for fear something might go wrong with his make-up.

Before they entered the gloom of the bamboo jungle that covered the hill up to the base of the fort, the girl paused.

"Wait a moment, Señor Corporal."

"We must hurry, *señorita*."

"Hurry for what?"

He was going to say for the execution, but he considered this a harsh word to use in the presence of so gentle a creature.

"Your father, as I have said, signaled that I fetch you. I must waste no time, inasmuch as I am a corporal."

"You shall waste enough time to tell me what all that signaling was about."

When Doña Dolores commanded, there was nothing for these constabulary soldiers to do but to obey.

"They have captured the Ameri-

cano. They have him up there in a cell. You need fear no more fighting. Hidalgo is crafty enough for that."

"And he is to be killed?"

"*Sí, señorita.* The perfidious Americano who fled last night from the wedding."

"And I am to witness his death?"

"*Sí, señorita.* A firing squad, of which I shall be corporal, will execute him."

"You?" she said, almost laughing.

"How brave you are! Stand out in the light of sunset so I may see you. I want to see if you are enough of a soldier to lead a firing squad."

He stood at attention for a moment—that is to say, as near the position of attention as the San Sebastian enlisted man can come.

He was a fat little *hombre* with a blue coat that was bereft of buttons and held together by a safety pin.

"You are a handsome soldier, Señor Corporal," Doña Dolores laughed.

The soldier swallowed this bit of flattery very easily.

"Will you remain a corporal all your life, and lead only seven men when you might lead a hundred?"

"No, *señorita.* It is my greatest desire to obtain a commission in the constabulary."

"That can be easily arranged."

The fat little man began to puff heavily with excitement.

"What are you saying, *señorita*?"

"A corporal must live in the *cuartel*, the barracks of the presidio. A general lives in his own *casa*, and gives balls and eats state dinners."

"*Señorita!* How is it you read my mind? For years I have dreamed of being a general in the constabulary. I read books on tactics, *señorita.* I study maps. I know the campaigns of our last revolution by heart! I am a military student. If I may only take an examination—"

"My father appointed the last general—who is now very old."

Indeed, that was the truth, and the

corporal knew it only too well. You could not advance in the constabulary without political aid. A corporal might be made a brigadier over night. What fairy tale was coming true at this magic hour, here on this desolate volcano island at dusk?

"*Señorita*, you are an angel from paradise!" He clasped his pudgy hands over his heart, he got to his knees, he reached out for her hand, and as she proffered it, he kissed it fervently. "Doña Dolores, what miracle is happening that you grant me this heavenly boon—"

"I grant it in return for a boon," she said.

"A boon? Have I ever been so fortunate as to do you a favor?"

"Not yet."

"Doña Dolores. Any deed you ask within the power of a mortal I will perform."

She turned up into the dusky shadows of the bamboo. A dense screen closed behind them, streaked with blood red where the bamboos were silhouetted slanting across the sky. In front of them was the gloom of the jungle, the steep trail, the cement and coral stone ramparts of the fort throwing back the glow of the sky.

At the bowered gate of the fort the girl put her hand on her guide's arm.

"You do as I say."

"*Señorita*, have I not sworn?"

"Obey every word to the letter, and without question."

"I am your slave, *señorita.*"

"I want a salute fired, such as you fired last night when I rode through the plaza to the church."

"It shall be done, *señorita.* It is just. A salute with blank cartridges after the execution? Yes, yes. It is a grim bit of justice. The bridegroom who forsook you at the altar. The same squad, *por Dios*, that fired the salute in the plaza before the ceremony was to have taken place, will salute the dead bridegroom!"

"You have the cartridges?"

"Of course, *señorita*. I was given two rounds to apportion the squad, one which we fired before you entered the church. The other we were to have fired when you came out a wedded bride. But we did not fire it."

"You have the round yourself?"

"In my cartridge belt, *señorita*. Eight cartridges."

"It is very good. That round you may use now." Then, as if by an after thought, she added: "You say they are blank cartridges?"

"*Sí, señorita*," he replied. "A blank apiece in our cartridge belts."

"Very well." They were about to enter the gate, but through the thick screen of vines and creepers, Dolores caught sight of the scene there in the court, a grim scene illumined only by the blood red sky of twilight, with the gaunt black figure of her father, the ragtag soldiers waiting for her, their cigarettes whirling slowly like the fire-flies in the vines of the wall; and that man standing there between the two old cannon, his hands behind his back.

Again Dolores clutched the fat, pudgy arm of the corporal.

"One thing more, *hombre*. If you wish to remain a corporal all your life and eat black beans, then you need not obey me."

"I shall obey, *señorita*. What trouble is it for me to have this salute fired? Am I not the corporal of the squad? An order from my mouth, the blanks put in the guns, the command to fire. And it is done."

"But you do not understand me yet. You are too much of a numskull, I am afraid, to be given a commission in our army."

"Understand you? How could you be more explicit?"

"I wish the blank cartridges to be used when you shoot the Americano."

The fat little man stiffened with surprise. What was this lunacy? What sort of intrigue was this crazy Doña Dolores getting him into? Blank car-

tridges when the execution was to take place right before the alcalde's hawk-like eyes! Impossible, suicidal!

She saw the look of terror come over him. "I think, after all," she said, "that you better remain a corporal and tend to canteens and buttons."

"If we shot him with blanks, the Americano would not fall. How then—"

"He will fall. You yourself shall tell him to. Being the corporal of the squad you will have a chance to speak to him."

"That is true, *señorita*. That is very true. But—"

"You shall tell him to fall and act as if dead until the alcalde leaves the fort. Then he is to escape to his boat."

"Your father, *señorita*—he will go to the man after the firing, and he will spit on him."

"No, you are wrong. My father will not go near a dead enemy. He is very superstitious about that. He will wait for the vultures to devour it."

"If I fail in this, *señorita*—"

"If you fail you will be a corporal until you are an old man."

"No, *por Dios*, the alcalde will sentence me to death, if I fail."

"Then you must succeed."

## CHAPTER XXI

### EXECUTION



THE sound of the alcalde clanking across the flagstones in his spurred boots broke in upon their whispering.

"Why are you standing here?" he snapped out at the corporal. "You are wasting my time. We must have done with this business before the sun sets!"

"I cannot persuade her to enter, *maestro*," the corporal pleaded.

The alcalde took his daughter's hand. "Why are you afraid, *chiquita*? I want you to see this. It will restore your pride. You may look into the

faces of the populace and laugh, instead of dropping your eyes. Yes, you can look into any man's face after you have seen this man fall."

He hurried her into the court where the soldiers were waiting, sitting on the ground with their backs against the wall, smoking, spitting, whispering ominously to themselves.

Just beyond them she could see the tall, serious face of the prisoner, his hands bound, his face turned upward, looking toward the turret.

And she saw the face of the American woman up there. The look of abject despair on that white visage cut into her like a knife. She gasped and clung to her father's hand to support herself.

"What is the matter?" Hidalgo snapped. "Can't you stand on your feet? Can't you stand up and look upon this scene of your honor being restored? Is that too ugly for your eyes?"

"Don't let them fire yet," she pleaded in a weak voice.

"Why not?" the father roared. "The sun is setting. These ragtag soldiers need light. They are poor shots at best."

"Not yet. I beg for one more moment."

"Another moment of that pig's life? What is the meaning of this? Are you faint-hearted? A Hidalgo woman unable to look upon an execution! *Madre de Dios*, what a miserable and cowardly *chiquita*!"

"I wish to see the woman," Doña Dolores said in a steady voice.

"What woman, for the love of God!"

"The woman who stole this bridegroom from my altar."

"So ho! That is how the wind lies. Of course! Jealousy must be the passion in your heart. *Bueno*. But what good will come of your seeing her? I have her imprisoned up there. You see her like an imbecile trying to chew the bars of a cage. She is mad, a claw-

ing, spitting catamount. Forget her, my child, and think only of the vengeance on this man."

"She stole him from me," Dolores said quietly. "That is why I want to see her. I want to see her face soiled with tears. I want to laugh at her."

Hidalgo himself laughed a dry, grim laugh and his teeth clacked.

"Now you are more like a Hidalgo woman!" he said proudly. "Go up there into that turret. One of the soldiers will go with you. Do not approach too close to the woman or she will claw out your eyes. Meanwhile the squad will line up and be ready."

He turned to the fat little corporal who stood, a shaking mass of jelly, at the alcalde's right hand.

"See to your squad, you! Let them stand here at twenty paces. See to their guns. Let nothing go wrong with this, or I'll tear your chevrons from your arm!"

The corporal waddled across the court to his soldiers.

"My chevrons, eh?" he was mumbling to himself. "Chevrons, *ph-tht!* What do I care for chevrons when I am promised epaulets. He will keep me apportioning black beans to privates and to myself for the rest of my life.

"One can advance nowhere in this army without gambling—big stakes must be risked. A man's life, my own life, the smile of a woman, an intrigue. That is the way Morada became general. That is how I, José del Gila, shall become general. Chevrons, *ph-tht!*"

He went over to his soldiers and the prisoner.

He would show the alcalde how an execution should be conducted. To each man he went. And each man's gun he took. Just what he was doing, examining those guns, even to taking out the cartridge and holding it up in the light, Hidalgo did not know. But it looked as if his corporal was taking to heart the warning that nothing must



go wrong with this execution.

Doña Dolores was led up the high winding cement stairs to the iron-hinged door of the turret room. A soldier sitting on the steps smoking a cigar and fighting off the stinging ants and flies, arose when he saw the alcalde's daughter.

The latter ordered him to stay outside together with the soldier who had brought her.

She then went in and immediately closed the door behind her.

An expression of obvious amazement came over her face when she saw the American girl.

The latter was seated in the corner of the bare, cell-like room where she had been thrown but a few moments before. Her hair was tousled, her face ashen, her eyes dilated, terrified.

How could this woman have stolen her bridegroom away, the alcalde's daughter wondered. What could a man see in that unkempt straw colored hair, those bloodless eyes, that bleached face? As Dolores looked down at her, at the ragged clothes, the muddied high laced boots, her Spanish eyes kindled into a scornful fire.

"I give you back your *hombre*," she said.

Staring at her as if at a hallucination the American girl gasped out in a voice like one talking in sleep:

"Who—are—you?"

"Hidalgo's daughter."

Meg Cameron recoiled, pressing against the corner of the cell like a trapped animal. "Have you come here to torture me?" she moaned.

"No. What do I care for you? If you were dying, I would not care. But your *hombre* was good to me. He knew my heart was breaking, when they gave me to him in marriage. He freed me. I am going to free him."

"Free him!" the other cried exultantly. "Free him! You mean he won't be killed, out there—shot to death! You mean you're showing mercy to him, you?"

"They will use blank cartridges. He will fall as if dead so that the alcalde will not suspect. Then, when he sees his chance, he will escape to the jungle. Then to the boat. Your boat. You must be there to meet him—with sails set. Then to sea. The launch will not follow, for I gave a soldier a turquoise to see that the engine will not work."

Meg Cameron began to laugh. She struggled to her feet, and staggered over toward the proud, gorgeous little figure, this thing she had thought an hallucination. She reached out to her to convince herself that the image was flesh and blood.

Doña Dolores stood there, proud, immobile, her jeweled hands hanging limply.

"I know it! I know it's true! You are a woman," Meg cried. "You could not see this murder! They wanted to kill him before your eyes. You could not see it. You are a woman—a good woman, *señorita*. You'll save him!"

"I love him, you understand? I love him as though he were my own child! You are giving my child back to me! I thank you. I bless you."

She reached forward into the dark, but found nothing. The narrow barred window admitted only a glow of amber light. The vision of Doña Dolores had faded, as the twilight came.

There was the swish of skirts, the soft rustle of silk, a fragrance. From above a bat frightened at the opening and closing of the door, winged down into the room, and disappeared again in the pitch blackness above.

Meg whirled about, dashing for the narrow casement that overlooked the court. She clutched at the rusty bars, thrusting her face between them, like a mad woman in a cell, crying out voicelessly for light.

Down there in the court she could see the whole drama as if she were in a high proscenium box looking upon the stage.

Meg Cameron heard Hidalgo's

sharp command to his soldiers. She saw them come to attention, four of them, the lanky Barbados negro, the black Jamaican boy, the chunky Carib, the slim Guanaco with the white beard.

Over there, between two rusty, moss-covered cannon, stood another soldier and a fat pompous little *hombre* in ragged blue coat and cotton breeches.

And between them she saw Dan Gregory, his arms bound, his face turned up to her.

Every cell in her body yearned to scream out. She choked. Her tongue, cleaving to the roof of her mouth, dammed back the cry in which she wanted to vent her abject terror. Her knuckles whitened as she gripped the iron, as if she were about to bend the bars, twisting them from the crumbled mortar, so that she could hurl herself into the center of that hideous stage.

But by sheer will power she controlled her throat, her lungs, her hands. She clung there. Her breath was held, her heart pounded.

She looked hungrily at the four tramps with their rifles. Her eyes fixed themselves on those weapons as if with a crazy desire to bore into them and see if they were loaded with blanks as that Spanish woman had promised.

Señorita Dolores was now at her father's side. He took her hand roughly and whirled her in front of him, pointing to the condemned man.

"There he is," he was saying; "look at him! Stand up straight. Be proud. Rejoice at what you are about to see!"

The gorgeous little figure straightened up dramatically. She clasped her jeweled hands in front of her, placing them over her breast. She turned her face toward the big Americano, but her eyes were cast sidewise at the firing squad. She, too, riveted her splendid eyes upon those guns.

Had the corporal been courageous? Or had he promised her and then turned yellow? Did he dare to reach out for the great commission she prom-

ised him, or was he still possessed of the soul of a corporal?

Both the women, holding their breath and riveting their gaze upon that wretched imitation of soldiery, were on the rack, both of them ready to scream aloud. The life of the Americano, they knew well enough, hung by the merest thread. The slightest catch in the complicated mesh of intrigue, and he was doomed.

What if the corporal thought better of his promise? What if the Americano failed to give a convincing simulation of death? What if Hidalgo, in his rage, decided to put one more bullet into the fallen body? What if he stayed in the court until the three vultures that were perched on the tower came down to feast on the carrion flesh?

Added to all these doubts that beset both Dolores and the American girl, the latter had one other: what if the *señorita*, smarting under the humiliation of her interrupted wedding, were toying with these helpless puppets, in order to satisfy some abnormal cruelty or whim?

A minute, a sentence of a word or two, and Dan Gregory would be shot. How many things could happen in that span of time? How many infinitesimal tricks of circumstance could sunder that thread by which this man's life hung?

The sun rolled down over the Cor-dilleras. The voice of the alcalde rang out thin, high pitched, piping:

"You who see this will bear witness hereafter that this Americano has been condemned by me in court martial, for the murder of my son's servant. It will be so written down in the records. You there, Corporal José del Gila, perform your duty!"

The little *hombre* ordered the squat, bull-necked Carib who had been standing guard over the prisoner to take his place in the firing squad.

The corporal himself turned to Gregory.

"When they fire, you will not be hit," he whispered. "But you are to fall as if dead, and thus remain till the alcalde leaves. Your woman will then be freed and she will meet you at your sloop."

Gregory kept his eyes on the face at the barred window. Not a word escaped his lips.

The fat little man took out his bandanna and held it up like a waiter holding a napkin to a guest. "Will you permit me to blindfold you?"

"No," the condemned man replied evenly.

"Then I will inspect the knots that bind you."

He went around behind, fumbled for a moment with the knots, and whispered: "By a little manipulation you will be able to cast off this reata."

The corporal then waddled off a few yards so as to be ostensibly outside the range of the squad.

"Ready!" he called out in a humble and uncertain voice.

"Aim!"

Up there in the turret above, the imprisoned woman pressed her face between the rusty bars. She could not restrain a heart-rending cry. Was it a dream? Was that visitation in the image of Doña Dolores a figment of her brain?

Was there some hideous practical joke being played upon her by that woman, or was it being played upon the gaunt sinister devil there standing hand in hand with his daughter to the right of the firing squad?

A shot rang out. The Jamaican boy, too nervous to wait for the command, or too eager to see the dreaded American fall, had pulled the trigger.

"Fire!" The high effeminate voice of the corporal rang out.

Three more shots followed in a random fusillade, not one of them coincident with the other. They reverberated in a series of ear-splitting cracks against the stone walls. Then, to keep that rattle of echoes going, the white-

bearded Guanaco, who had snicked his trigger on an imperfect shell, cocked it again and fired.

The "condemned" paused just long enough to give the simulation of the body's final convulsion against unwelcome death.

His knees sagged, and he fell. He rolled to his side, his face turned toward the triumphant Hidalgo, his back and bound hands close to the wall behind.

Meg Cameron heard each separate shot, as if they had pierced her to the very brain. Her knees weakened. She sank, clinging to the bars of the casement as if to save herself from the whirling abyss of darkness that surged upward toward her.

Her face drained of blood, and her eyelids closed. But she opened them with a start when the echoes of those hideous barks died away. She saw her lover lying there between the moss-covered cannon—lying as still, as shapeless as a dead body.

She saw the fat corporal waddling over to him, his puffy chest heaving under the tightly pinned coat, his big feet dragging, hesitant, uncertain, as though he were walking a tight rope.

She saw him kneel down clumsily and lift Gregory's shoulder in order to turn him over. Either his intent was too uncertain, or his strength too weak. The big shoulder fell down again inert, to the flagstone.

"The *hombre* is dead, Señor Alcalde!" the corporal announced.

A low, despairing moan drifted down from the barred casement.

Doña Dolores looked up. The afterglow of sunlight was all that illumined that ugly stage now. It cast an unnatural glow over the oval ashen face.

The Spanish girl was gripped with a desire then to console that unhappy mortal. A surge of pity, that was very much like the pity of a mother for some one else's child, went through Doña Dolores.

She yearned to cry out reassuringly:

"You have won, you American woman! Go to your ship. Your lover will come to you!"

But *had* the American woman won? Had the corporal actually changed those cartridges? Was he true to his word? He who was false to his colors in making that promise? Whom had he betrayed, Doña Dolores or his military duty?

She turned her anxious, frightened face toward the fat little hulk of a man who was waddling across the court toward them in the twilight.

Their eyes met, but she could not understand the look. He did not smile. He did not dare to. He was afraid. That was clear, and that much she thought was good news. His lips were trembling. He put his hand up to his sleeve, and the fat, pudgy fingers seemed devoid of bone.

"You are satisfied that he is dead?" the alcalde asked sternly.

"One hit was in the heart, *maestro*," the corporal said.

The alcalde felt his daughter's hand twist as though a current had gripped it. He looked down at her.

"You are satisfied, *chiquita*?" he demanded.

She looked earnestly, fiercely at the corporal's face. She did not know whether she was satisfied or not.

The corporal's hand fumbling at his sleeve was tearing the thread of the chevron!

There was the answer! The shapeless, grotesque little man, trembling in the presence of the grim alcalde, was actually signaling the newly acquired power he had over the alcalde's daughter! He would make her remember her word for which he had jeopardized his very life.

There he was, taking the chevron from his flabby arm, and stuffing it into his pocket.

He was a corporal no longer in his ambitious heart.

What need had this José del Gila for chevrons?

Had he not performed a deed that would win him epaulets?

Chevrons, *por Dios!* He spat.

## CHAPTER XXII

### PARADISE



IN the upper reaches of the inlet, the sloop Chita loomed in the red dusk, swinging lazily at her moorings. Her gaff, which had been hastily and only partially lowered, remained a few feet above the boom, its peak doused and touching the deck, the mainsail dumped in a heap over deck and boom.

The wind kept the old boat mawing up and down, sheering against the mud lump that stretched out like a finger from the shore, swinging back again, creaking gently at her moorings.

On the shore a frail lame being, strangely small, black and insect-like in that immensity of cliffs and blood-red water, was in heavy labor. Out of the shoulder-high grass he came puffing and staggering under the weight of his burden.

He limped heavily across the mud lump, and with a final, desperate effort, heaved his burden to the deck of the sloop.

Then he disappeared into the grass again, his flat chest heaving, his weak hand wiping the sweat from his face. Out he came once more, bearing another burden that seemed heavy enough to break his back.

Again and again he made this trip from sloop to mud lump, to beach, to grass pasture. After awhile he had a heap of what looked like ooze-slimed junk on board the boat.

It was in the midst of this work that Pasqual Hidalgo heard the crack of the guns up there in the fort.

The sound came down, a sharp, jarring break in the soft croon of the wind in the palms and bamboo, the lapping of water about the hull, the waving of the grass, the call of jungle birds.



The execution had been accomplished. The grim old alcalde of Todos Santos had avenged his daughter's insult! Pasqual Hidalgo laughed aloud.

But he was not out of danger yet. The precious secret of that treasure was not his own. There was one person alive who still shared in the knowledge of it: the American woman.

There was a chance, Pasqual reflected, that she had gone back to the fort in an attempt to save her lover. But what of that? She would not be very likely to give up her secret to Hidalgo; nor to any one else for that matter. And the probability was that, now she had heard the guns of the firing squad, she would not be thinking of the treasure at all.

Furthermore, if she were thinking of it, what then? She had no reason to suppose that Pasqual had hidden it within a few yards of her sloop.

But there was still a grave danger. In putting out to sea, he would have to pass the launch. If the girl saw him sailing for the bar in her sloop, she might very reasonably suspect the truth. Why should he be sailing in her sloop when his own launch was there ready to take him home? She would ask herself that. And she would not have to think very hard for an answer. She would realize that he was making off with the treasure.

Then what would she do? She would, in her desperation, reveal everything.

He must hasten with his work. They would be coming down to the inlet, now that the execution was over. They would liberate the American woman, for Pasqual knew well enough his father would not molest her. For a while, perhaps, she might stay up there to guard the body of her lover from the island vultures, but this was by no means a certainty. Pasqual realized he had no time to lose.

In frantic haste he finished up his task, then, weary and breathless, he

climbed to the deck and gathered the rotten old sail in big armfuls, heaving it over the boom so that it would not get foul of the cargo of treasure.

Next he got the mainsheet and jib sheets clear, for they were all in a tangle just as the girl had left them when she first went ashore that day.

Another minute and Pasqual was ready to stand off. There remained only the arduous task of setting the huge, moldy sail, and of casting off the mooring line.

Then, with that splendid breeze he could put out to sea with his fortune.

As the dusk deepened up there in the fort, a group of shadowy figures were departing into the darkness of the jungle.

Hidalgo, swaggering in his triumph, towered over all the others like a giant specter. He ordered the corporal to take his squad back to the launch. They departed, gray specters of six different shapes. Doña Dolores, remaining with her father, was the only touch of light in the monotone, her white mantilla and jeweled comb still reflecting the faint glow.

Off in the corner of the court was a dark mass, like a heap of old clothes. Up there in the turret window, which caught more light than the depths of the court, there was that pallid oval face, the white clutching hands.

On the crenelated wall that circled the roof of the turret three of the El Capitan vultures were perched, looking down like evil spirits upon the departing of the mortals from the scene.

"You have forgotten the American woman," Doña Dolores said as her father was leading her to the bowered gate.

Hidalgo paused. "Yes, I forgot her."

He went to the door of the tower himself, and called up to the soldier who had been posted as guard. "You hear me up there! Bring the woman down."

Shortly the ragged soldier came out into the court leading his prisoner.

"You are free," Hidalgo said to Meg Cameron. "You go away. Go down to your sloop. No. You need not wait to see the vultures take care of that—" He nodded to the heap over across the court. "Don't stay here to mourn over his body, or to give him burial. He must be left for the vultures."

Meg Cameron was looking at the heap over between the two cannon. A fierce desire was consuming her. If she could only go to him.

But the ugly little gnome who had acted as guard over her, stood in her path. With the giant sombrero on his crooked little form, he was like a poisonous mushroom that had sprung out of the weeds in front of her.

And next to him was the far more dangerous figure of Hidalgo.

"No. You go out of that gate," the alcalde said. "I'll have no prayers said over that carcass. He despised our blood! Very well. Let the vultures drink his blood. That's all it's good for."

The girl tried desperately to collect her wits.

Could she brush by the gaunt threatening figure? If she did, would he not follow? Something might happen to reveal the precious secret, the secret that the heap of clothes over there was not a carcass, but a living man.

But as she paused in front of Hidalgo a dreadful doubt tortured her:

*Was Dan Gregory alive after all?*

She clenched her fists, digging her nails into her palms in a desperate attempt to control herself. She must not go over there. She must be docile. She must go down to the sloop and pray to Heaven that Dan would meet her. And she knew he would meet her, unless that inscrutable and arrogant little sphinx, Doña Dolores, had lied.

She cast a helpless, tortured glance at the *señorita*. It was too dark to read those eyes—luminous as they

were. They might be consoling her with a deep, sisterly pity. They might be laughing with the deadly humor of a woman who had been scorned.

*Was Dan Gregory dead?* The doubt burned her as she circled around the threatening figure of Hidalgo whose long, grotesque arm pointed toward the gate of the court.

Then she found herself enveloped in the soft, hot arms of Doña Dolores, who had leaped in front of her. She smelled the faint fragrance of Parisian perfumes. She felt the eager and persuasive force of that frail body.

"Go back to your sloop," the *señorita* said, "where the ghost of your lover will join you."

Half mad with doubt, Meg Cameron could not restrain a passionate cry: "You mean—"

"The ghost of your lover will sail with you out to sea."

Meg turned quickly to see if Hidalgo understood this. He had heard the statement, but it bore no significance in his mind. Evidently his foolish daughter had relented. Like any woman, her heart had gone out in pity to this other woman, this enemy.

Again he ordered the American girl to leave the scene.

Meg Cameron, momentarily buoyed up by the *señorita's* cryptic statement, came to her senses. She decided to go on down to the sloop. The quicker she left that court the better. Nothing could possibly be gained by going to that shapeless mass of clothes and flesh and bones off there in the shadow of the seaward wall.

If Dan were dead, then he was dead. If she went to him and found that he was alive, then her act might result in a tragic turning of the tables. She must clench her teeth, dig her nails into her palms, steel her will. She must leave him there and follow out the *señorita's* command.

With one last, tortured glance across the court at the recumbent form, she turned and then swiftly sped through

the bowered gate into the jungle. Then she struck off at a run on one of the many trails through the woods to the end of the inlet where her sloop was moored.

The words of the *señorita* rang in her ears. "The ghost of your lover will join you." A surge of hope went through her frame like an ecstasy. It must be true. The little *señorita* could not have lied. What had she gained by lying? Why doubt her any more?

Meg Cameron ran on through the fragrant dusk, drinking deep of the riotous odors of the jungle, the flowers, the sweet smelling cedars, the pungent smell of the moss, the lush breath of the lagoon, the fresh salt air of the wind from the sea.

A glorious wind! A glorious tropic twilight. What a promise Heaven had sent to her, the promise to sail away with her lover, who had been saved from the jaws of death.

Her lover would be arising now from that grim floor. She looked back at the turret, silhouetted against the streaks of red in the sky like bleeding wounds. Little black forms were crouching there—vultures.

If Dan Gregory had been dead, they would not be staying up there any longer. But there they were waiting in grim patience, as they had waited all along, perhaps with some uncanny prescience that out of that meaningless pantomime of mortals in the court below there would come a meal of carrion sooner or later.

But they were cheated, those birds of prey. The girl was certain of it now. Dan was arisen. He was probably following along one of those jungle trails at that moment. There were many trails made by the wild hogs, by tapir or ocelot or goats, down to the lagoon.

And from one trail you could not see who was on the other. Dan might be working his way around that hill toward the lagoon so as to avoid any chance of being discovered by Hidalgo or his men. He might, with his great-

er speed, overtake the girl, or else pass on before her without her seeing.

Again, thrilled with an expectancy of triumph, Meg Cameron fled on out into the open swamp that bordered the inlet. It was a veritable flower garden of hyacinths and orchids and tree sunflowers. In the warm dusk she could see broken blossoms scudding before the wind, lilies, marigolds, the fluffy balls of mimosa. Fireflies were everywhere. Big velvet moths and the petals of flowers borne on the wind brushed her hot cheek.

*"The ghost of your lover—"*

She could scarcely wait to get to that blessed trysting place. She felt, in fact she knew beyond any shadow of a doubt, that she and her lover were both racing along so that they might meet in each other's arms.

She quickened her step. She leaped like a doe across the alligator runs, across the hyacinth choked rivulets, and sped out on the sandy beach.

There was the sloop, looming like a giant bird on the water. Her heart pounded with joy. She gave a soft, exultant cry. The sail was being set! The gaff was climbing up the mast in spasmodic jerks with a rattle of blocks!

The glorious revelation thrilled her: Dan had arisen. He had raced her through the jungle, taking an inland trail, and had passed her!

The sail was up as she reached the spit of land and mud that jutted out into the lagoon. She saw the form of a man, merging into the jet background of cliffs.

"Dan! Dan!" she cried. "I'm here! I've come to you! We're free!"

She saw the almost indistinguishable form stand out before the mast.

She checked herself on the verge of crying out again. She saw him waving his hand. He did not call. Of course he did not. She might have known how dangerous it was to call out there, where a voice will travel the whole length of the cliff-bound inlet. Instead of answering, she saw an arm, silhou-

etted against the luffing sail, waving to her frantically.

She had not paused. She crossed the spit of land in a few deft leaps, and then nimbly took the jump from land to boat, as if she had wings.

She landed up forward, directly where the man stood in front of the big mast. She sank into his outstretched arms.

Then she awakened from the glorious ecstasy of her dream. The slight form, the wizened but wiry arm, the lips pressed against her lips!

She had dreamed of being borne again into paradise, enveloped in the arms of her lover.

And she had awakened to find herself in the arms of Pasqual Hidalgo.

### CHAPTER XXIII

#### THE GHOSTS OF THE JUNGLE



HE old alcalde, still gripping his daughter's hand, waited at the gate of the fort. Just why did he wait? Had he some fear that the American woman would come back to fight the vultures from the body of her lover? Or had he a premonition that his squad had not accomplished their work after all?

Or did he remain simply because of his morbid desire to see the Americano's body torn to pieces by those rapacious birds?

It was this last motive that kept him on the scene.

He drew his daughter into the thick dark bower of the gate.

"We shall wait here," he said, "out of sight—so the vultures will not be afraid to come down. I want you to see one thing more."

"My father!" she cried in a faint, despairing voice, "I have seen enough!"

"Not yet! Those birds up there. We must see their feast."

"I cannot. The thought sickens me. I beg you, my father, take me

down to the launch, and let us sail away from this evil place."

Yes, it was an evil place. That was the right way to describe it. Señor Hidalgo was a superstitious man—and when in the presence of death he was subject to an intangible and vague sort of fear. He clung fiercely to the shrinking little hand.

Fear and his daughter's supplications bade him go. But his hate, and his morbid wish to see his vengeance perfectly consummated, bade him stay.

He would stay; but he would not approach too close to that corpse.

He was deaf to Dolores's fervent prayers. Let her babble, the little child. He clung to her hand with an inexorable grip; he clung to her as she sank to her knees before him.

He waited there, his eyes ablaze, eager for the sight of those black things up there to spread their giant wings and swoop down to their feast.

One of them emitted a cry. It was a note that fitted in harmoniously with that composition of uncanny sounds—the wailing wind, the lonely rhythm of beach combers, the drone of the night insects. The atmosphere worked upon the alcalde's superstitious soul, for it was at once warm and chilly, musty, thick with the odors of the swamp on the inland side of the fort.

As his daughter wept aloud and begged him to come away, he peered with a fierce, burning hatred at the thing lying over there on the other side of the court. He was not sure that he could see it now. It was little more than a dark smirch between two lumbering black things like crouching lions, the cannon.

Fireflies moved about in space like roving stars, and their brilliance confused the alcalde's sight. The atmosphere seemed moving, alive with vapors and green eyes. He thought he saw the dark thing over there by the cannon move.

Although he was convinced this was only a trick that his eyes were playing



him, he shrank back into the vines, his heart pounding, his cold hand clutching the hand of his daughter until she screamed.

A vulture up there on the turret moved at the sudden sound, spreading a tremendous span of wings.

Now the feast would start!

But the vulture did not come down. Balancing itself a moment on the edge of the turret, it folded up its wings and just sat there, grim, sinister, waiting.

Again Hidalgo peered fiercely into the dusk. *Was* there a heap of clothes there between the cannon? He had seen it a moment ago, but the dark splotch had melted into the shadows. There were the two cannon just as sturdy and immovable as they had stood for half a century. He could see their round backs, their little chunky wheels, like haunches, their muzzles like small, round heads on the huge bodies, facing out to sea.

His eyes dilated—partly because of the rapidly growing darkness, partly because of his own fright.

No, the splotch of black which had been a man's body was no longer there on the mossy flagstones. But something was there in a different form. It had moved upward somewhat, elongated itself, taking on a new, gaunt outline like ectoplasm oozing out of a corpse.

A strange, long, towering shadow, that was what the terror-stricken alcalde saw.

He gripped his daughter's hand tightly.

The shadow came toward him, dilating, growing blacker, taking a more definite form.

Hidalgo heard the soft fall of footsteps, the padding of shoes on the moss. He crouched and remained motionless in the thicket, behind the gate. His heart made the only sound, laborious, pumping the blood that had turned thick and cold.

The shadow moved above him, tow-

ering silhouetted against a piece of red sky, and revealing the perfect figure of a man.

The alcalde clutched his daughter in his arms, like a drowning man clutching a straw.

The gaunt black figure paused a moment—within arm's length of him, and then dived into the brush by his side, crashing through the dense growth of creepers and high grass and bamboo like a frightened stag.

Not a ghost, but a man!

That was very obvious from the sound of the dry grass, the broken twigs.

The alcalde sprung up with a cry, threw his daughter from him, darted out from his hiding place, drew his revolver.

He had a flashing glimpse of a gray shadow, sweeping across a gray background, and that was all. It had disappeared before he could raise his revolver.

Running to the crest of a knoll part way down the hill, he caught another fleeting glimpse. A smaller shadow—like a wild hog, tearing madly down the hillside, then vanishing into another patch of jungle.

Again another glimpse, far down the hill, smaller, scarcely discernible in the deep twilight. It might have been a peccary running across a swamp, except that it was running with the speed of a wolf, heading now in a straight line for the farther reach of the lagoon where the sloop was.

A red sky, a red lagoon, the sloop etched black on the water, a panorama of gray jungle. A few faint stars in the sky, fireflies of the same green brilliance against the jungle background, a twinkle of these same lights reflected in the wind rippled lagoon—that was all the alcalde could see.

Now that the fear of ghosts had been dispelled, he was calm. The fugitive had escaped to the sloop, but what of that? He would have to make several tacks from shore to shore before

getting out to sea. He would have to pass the launch—or, if he escaped that by quartering across the inlet, he would have to approach the near shore at least twice in his tacks.

There was all the time in the world. Hidalgo could get down there, not with his traitorous soldiers, but alone, alone with his gun.

He turned back, and swinging along, half running, half leaping, half sliding down the banks, he descended the trail to the beach.

Doña Dolores followed, crying out softly, frantically—an incoherent jumble of prayers to the blessed saints.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FATHER



HE sloop's mainsail had filled, and, leaning over to the steady breeze, the lumbering old craft moved away from the spit of land.

Meg Cameron had no memory of what had happened. There she was, helpless in the grip of that wiry arm, dazed, as if some one had landed a crushing blow on her unprotected head.

She struggled faintly, and then Pasqual, knowing that he would have to take the wheel as the sloop stood off, hurled her with one violent swing, so that she fell backward into the ooze-slimed heap on deck. Her head had struck a hard, metallic object, cushioned only with a thin coating of mud, and the blow sent stars careening before her.

For a moment she lay there, unconscious of the roaring of the sail as the sloop, without a hand at her wheel, turned into the wind.

She became slowly aware that the land was receding, that a dark, agile form was leaping aft to the wheel, that the sail had stopped luffing and the deck had tilted. Again the sail, a huge, hovering shadow above her, had silenced itself as it filled. The mast

creaked and the stays strained in the strong wind.

As she lay there, looking upward into the crimson flare beyond the gaff and masthead, she felt the deck steadying itself as the sloop stood away on a long tack. The bow wave began to pile, gurgling merrily.

She struggled up, the salty taste of blood in her mouth, the steady lilt of the boat turning her dizzy, the pale stars swinging backward far above the mast.

Where was she? Out there on the breast of the lagoon, sailing along, in a harmony of lapping waves and straining stays and spanking breeze.

And aft there at the stern she saw a slim, black figure of a man or devil at the wheel.

She saw him come toward her as she got to her feet.

Which way could she turn to flee? She looked at one side, then the other. For a moment her dazed brain was baffled with the choice that lay before her: which way to jump—to that shore beyond the boom, or to that shore on the windward side? Both were close enough to swim to.

But as she made a lurch toward the lee rail, the man caught her.

"No, you don't, *señorita*. You have a secret that is too precious to betray. Besides, I want you. I have everything else to live for—and I want a woman to enjoy life with me. Out to sea! You *sabe*? Down the coast. South America, you and I, with our fortune all to ourselves!"

He was dragging her aft as the sloop, without a hand at her wheel, turned again into the wind and righted herself. He got to the wheel in time to make her pay off, tipping on the same tack.

As he did this he held the girl there in an inexorable grip—one hand on her wrist, the other on the wheel.

"I'll get you out at sea, and then maybe you'll think twice about jumping, eh? There are sharks in this la-

goon—watch out. Be a good *señorita*. We have everything in the world. Remember that. No use giving it up, because you despise Pasqual Hidalgo.

"I am good enough. Wait until you see me in my palace in Buenos Aires. Wait till you see yourself beside me, in the Parisian gown and the pearls I buy for you. Glorious life, *por Dios!* You and I together! Can you think of hurling yourself to those sharks now?"

She sank to her knees, moaning, still dizzy from her fall, dizzy from the sight of that receding shore, those whirling stars high up there in the red sky; nauseated at the sound of his voice, at the touch of his rootlike hand growing into her flesh.

He made the tack easily with within a boat's length of the opposite shore. When she had come about, the sloop leaned over again coming back to the beach from which they had started.

The launch was a good way off. They would have to pass her, but this they could do when on the second tack across the inlet. Pasqual did not want to steer too close to his father's soldiers and their launch. He did not want them to see him standing there at the wheel. It would surprise them greatly.

The tack brought him back a furlong away from the spit of land from which he had started.

The shore presented a broad wall of jet black jungle, with a narrow strip of beach.

A crowd of people might have stood on that black beach of volcanic ash, weeds, and ooze without being seen. For the dusk had deepened almost to the darkness of night, and the form of any man standing there would have been completely invisible against the background of bamboo and creepers.

Pasqual kept on his course toward that beach, totally free of any further worry. The girl was on her knees before him, helpless. As he twisted her wrist, holding her down in that posi-

tion, he laughed at her, cajoling her with his swollen promises of luxury and love. Buenos Aires, a palace, carriages, fifty servants, a yacht—all would be hers.

He came within two boat's lengths of the shore before turning his wheel to come about.

But as he was ready to make the tack, something happened.

He did not turn that wheel.

When after his wild race through the jungle, Dan Gregory reached the shore, he was astounded to see that the sloop had put off.

Just what did this mean? Had the girl believed that he had really been killed? Had something slipped up in that complicated intrigue up there in the fort, an intrigue about which Gregory was totally in the dark? He had been told to fall as if dead, and then to run down to the sloop. His girl would meet him there. Beyond this he knew nothing. Had they failed to get the message to Meg Cameron?

He could think of no other answer to the riddle. For there was the sloop across the inlet, a dim, ghostly thing drawing a long, gleaming line of phosphorescence on the breast of the red water. She was under sail and making good headway, that was very evident.

But just what did it all mean? Was Meg Cameron actually sailing out to sea alone—carrying with her the pitiful delusion that she was leaving her lover dead on that ill-fated island?

He saw the sloop tacking when she reached the opposite shore, then heading back for the beach on which Dan stood.

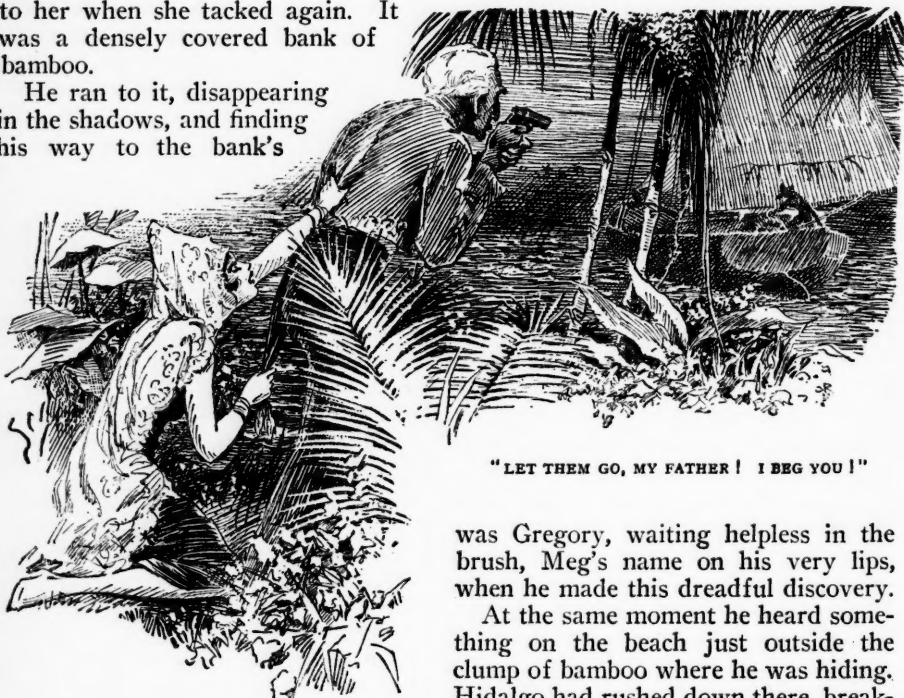
He was estimating just where she would make the next tack, and just how close she would come to his shore before making it. Meg had sailed the old tub into the inlet twice before, and she seemed to have a pretty good idea of the depth.

At other times she had come within

a boat's length of the shore before tacking. The beach shelved off sharp, and at places the jungle overhung the water so that the sloop could nose in as far as she wanted without shoaling.

From the angle the craft was taking on this tack, Gregory picked out a spot on shore which would be the nearest to her when she tacked again. It was a densely covered bank of bamboo.

He ran to it, disappearing in the shadows, and finding his way to the bank's



"LET THEM GO, MY FATHER! I BEG YOU!"

edge, firmly resolved to dive into the water as the sloop approached. He could then call out to the girl.

The old hulk came cutting through the water, piling up a bank of gleaming light at her prow. The sail was getting the full force of the wind, so that the mast tipped well to leeward.

Then, just as Gregory was about to hurl himself into the dark water, he saw who it was that was standing at the wheel.

That is to say, he knew that it was not Meg Cameron, but a man. He was standing there, one hand on the wheel, the other holding the arm of Meg, who was on her knees before him!

Although because of the darkness it was impossible to tell just who that man was, Gregory was certain that it was Pasqual.

If he had had a gun it would have been the easiest shot in his life to hit that hideous black form. But there

was Gregory, waiting helpless in the brush, Meg's name on his very lips, when he made this dreadful discovery.

At the same moment he heard something on the beach just outside the clump of bamboo where he was hiding. Hidalgo had rushed down there, breaking through the grass, and leaping out to the black cinder beach.

His daughter had followed close upon his heels, and it was her voice which Gregory heard first:

"Let them go, my father! I beg you! Do not commit this hideous deed! My father, on my knees—"

She fell down in the cinders before him, screaming, clinging to his arm. But he threw her off.

"There he is!" Hidalgo's voice, low and vibrant, pierced the dusk. "He had time to get aboard, did he? To rise from the dead and meet his woman and sail away to sea! There he is, holding her hand! The dog Americano!"



"My father! My father! Have mercy on their miserable souls—"

"His blood was too good for ours, eh? *Bueno!* I will spill it with my own hand!"

"I beg, I cry for mercy. I, your *chiquita*, I beg for their lives, my father!"

"Let his blood be on my soul, the dog! Thus I keep my promise to you, *chiquita!* He dies, as I swore to Heaven, before your eyes. There! Behold him fall!"

He raised his revolver and fired just as the helmsman, who had heard Dolores's wild cry, turned his wheel hard.

The sloop's stern swept around in full view of those on shore. There was Pasqual—a slight, twisted sort of shadow, clinging to the wheel for a brief second, sagging at the knees, his ungainly little head falling to his chest. Then, with a final struggle for life, his form lurched forward to the deck.

"*Madre de Dios!*" Doña Dolores screamed. "You have killed your own son!"

Hidalgo staggered back, the smoking revolver in his hand. He straightened up then, without so much as a gasp or an oath, and stood there, staring at the big sloop which was helpless and staggering under the incomplete tack. He heard the loud banging of the canvas, a deafening din as the mainsail, hovering over him, blotted out the glow of the sky.

Yes, all light was smothered out. The gaunt, tall form of the father could be seen by no one. Stricken and dazed he stood there until the hovering sail filled away.

Then the glow of the sky fell upon the tragic figure: old Hidalgo, tall, straight, spellbound, his hands hanging listlessly to his sides, the revolver falling with a slight click upon a slab of lava at his feet. That and the moaning of Dolores, kneeling beside him and wringing her hands, were the only sounds.

During the luff Dan Gregory had leaped into the warm, brackish water. Unseen by any one in that tragic climax, he swam out with a few powerful strokes—sending handfuls of phosphorescent light swishing behind him.

Meg Cameron was trying to coax the boat to pay off, but the tricky old craft seemed as dazed as Hidalgo himself at what had happened. The helmsman dying at her wheel had clutched the spokes and fallen, and the boat failed to make even a pilot's luff.

Hanging indecisively in the eye of the wind, she yawed over a bit toward shore. Meg sprang to the wheel, and was trying to help the stricken old boat when a man climbed over the rail and whispered to her:

"Meg!"

She gasped. Then, as she saw the drenched figure coming aft toward her, she recognized her lover.

She never remembered how she answered that whispered call. She said something. Judging by the ring of her voice it might have been a passionate cry of love, a prayer of thanks to God. But the words themselves were far more suitable to the exigency of that soul-thrilling moment.

She wanted some one to help her get the boat off on the tack. And here was the hand to help her:

"Trim down the jib sheet!" It was an exultant cry to get the sloop under way so that the two lovers would be forever free of Hidalgo and the volcano island.

It is extraordinary how a nautical command can sound like a prayer, even without the usual garnishment of oaths.

Gregory obeyed. A gust of wind caught the flattened jib, and the sloop began to pay off. In another moment the mainsail filled, and they went sailing away, the lee rail rolling in a gleaming cascade of fire.

Gregory ran aft, and consigned the body of Pasqual Hidalgo to the black waters of the lagoon. Could it all be

true, that hideous dream, this glorious awakening?

There was still the launch off there.

"Can you get by that boat?" Gregory asked.

"No fear of that," Meg answered.

"The little Spanish girl had some one fix the engine."

"By Heaven, then we're free!" he cried, holding her tightly, fervently, as she steered for the bar of the lagoon.

"Yes, free, and taking our fortune with us," she said, pointing to the muddy cargo.

For the first time Gregory saw the heap of grotesque objects on the deck. Calendrical records carved in gold, covered with moss and slime, a chest incrustated in lava; scepters, urns, idols.

"If they knew we had this on board—" he began.

"You and I are the only ones in the world who know, besides that man whose body you threw overboard. And he kept it a secret." Then she added: "There was his mozo, but he was dead when he reached the reef at Todos Santos."

"Then the secret is ours."

"And the fortune is ours," Meg said. "I mean it all belongs to you."

He cast a quick, significant glance at her face. "You mean—"

"If you take me," she said.

He did not so much as kneel down to examine that hodgepodge of ooze and weeds and gold. He kept his arm tightly about the girl as she steered.

"I'm the richest man in the world—without that," he said, as they passed under the grim turrets of the fort and sailed for the horizon.

THE END

#### WATER AGAIN!

THREE years now, no rain nor snow,

An' the stock all had to go,

The whole place looked like somethin' God forgot,

Little dogies wondered why

Mother cows had all gone dry.

A-sickin' an' a-dyin' on the spot!

To-day, it opened up an' let

The rains come good an' hard an' wet,

Hear the washes runnin' high an' wild an' mad?

Careful where you camp to-night,

Choose a mesa dry an' right,

If the floods get you, well, friend, it's jes' too bad!

The buckaroos are sayin'

All the bosses have been prayin';

That's how come the cows dropped twins this year,

Feed aplenty you can bet,

Water holes all deep an' wet,

For the mountain streams are runnin' sweet an' clear!

See that giant cactus flowerin'?

Guess misfortune has quit glowerin'

On this parched an' thirsty stretch of cattle land;

When the mountain tops get gray,

Fallin' weather's on its way,

On the ranges that's the one thing we call grand!

Why, my pony feels it, too,

He's a-quiver through and through;

Steady, Spareribs, while I roll myself a smoke;

Now, then! Buck an' paw an' wind,

An' in hoss talk speak your mind,

Let 'er rip! That cock-eyed durned ole drought is broke!

Peter A. Lea

